The Bottle-Fillers

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The Bottle-Fillers

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By

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NOTE

A YEAR ago to-day I completed the revision of a typed MS. which now goes to press entitled, as I desired, "The Bottle-Fillers." That is to say, as a Yankee once expressed it, diving straight to the bedrock of fact, sailors of the red ensign and of the blue.

They were peaceful enough men in the days with which this story is concerned, engaged in extracting, unsung, such nourishment as may be obtained from a nearly dry crust, and the nation was unaware of them.

To-day they are warriors even as their brothers of the white ensign, and have given their quota of blood without chaffering—commanders, lieutenants, midshipmen of the R.N.R. and Fleet Reserves; men for mine-sweeping, mine-laying, trailing lures for submarines, patrolling, trooping, fighting—anywhere where the seas roll and Britain's need was greatest. Men from the depths lifted to the heights; men without promise alive suddenly to the wording of His Majesty's order given last May—"The King realises what magnificent work has been done by the brave officers and crews of his Merchant Service during the past months of war."

The King realises! And the question arises, does the nation also realise?

One goes back to this story of the all too common events of our sea history during the smug and soul-stifled days of a harnessed and peaceful competition. It has nothing more warlike in its structure than the war against odds, ashore and afloat, which is the perennial business of seamen. It treats of certain factors which belong to the dormant past, the stupid loadline and stupider deckload which we tamely adopted at the bidding of our competitors; of the officers and men, accoutrements rusty or flung aside, wearily engaged in directing great ships hither and

thither upon the seas, and in the process filling the pantries and cupboards of the British nation. It touches on the attitude of that nation which has lately risen from its sleep, honour and justice on its lips, to strike an enemy who long had strangled it. It touches, too, on the attitude of Authority . . . an attitude which must never again obtrude ; which must remain buried, as the war has buried it, deep—deep as the seas which lie over murdered *Lusitania.*

E. N.

Ore,
July 23rd, 1915.

Phase the First

The Riddle

CHAPTER I

THE RIDDLE

Gutterin' through the dark
  Climbin', not fer joy,
Rollin' like the good old Ark
  Just fer to annoy?
Quakin' like a naspen tree
  Tossin' in the wind,
Everytime she 'its a sea
  Flat, wiv 'er be'ind.

Dollopin', wallopin', blindly
  Over the sea we go
Buttin' at mountains gaily
  Just as if we's a Show!
Wallopin', dollopin', bashin' 'em,
  Bound fer 'Amburg they say,
Wiv a deckload playin' Ka-fu-salem
  Like as if she's a dray.

A STEAMER rolled mammering in the lap of a grey sea which welled on her quarter.

She seemed to be in doubt of her builder's intention. Whether, for instance, she should remain under water or above water, sidelong upon it or sidelong beneath it, upon her head or upon her tail—whether indeed it would not be well to turn turtle and try the effect of that.

They called her the *Sphinx*, which was inappropriate, seeing she had neither the head of a woman nor the body of a lioness—still, she was inscrutable, enigmatic as the dainty personage who christened her.

In 1902, when she was born, she was something to look at. She had a shiny, pink belly and a shiny, grey back. White and buff had been adopted for her scheme of ornamentation, and men who flourished stencil plates had worked patterns on the three turrets she carried for housing her crew. She shone mellow and rotund on that day as a cheese; but her managing owner, when he saw her standing out to sea, loaded, and with an orange dawn for background, decided she looked like a castle. "A picture of

battlements and straight, stiff spars, beautiful to see," was the figment he found for her.

Perhaps he was right; but this happened six years ago. Since then she had essayed the problem of carrying deckloads, her crew had learned to call her the *Riddle*, and William Tipton, master mariner, had decided to come out of her. Of course this necessitated finding a new skipper, and presently Denis O'Hagan, lately an officer in the mail service, applied. The managing owner, or, to speak by the book, Messrs. Sharum, Fit & Co., Ltd., said he liked the look of him. He added in a ruminating fashion entirely his own, that if Captain O'Hagan cared to invest in the *Sphinx*, he thought he could promise him the job. Captain O'Hagan, with a snug little legacy burning a hole in his pocket, thought he could. There were *pourparlers* in consequence, and Denis O'Hagan presently stood in the shoes of William Tipton, master mariner, late of the *Sphinx*, without in any way consulting him.

This was a pity. Indeed it may be taken as the initial mistake unless you are a misogamist and are prepared to attribute all that follows to Lucy, who at this moment was making ready to marry Denis O'Hagan; or are prepared to assert that sailors should remain unmarried.

As a matter of fact Captain Tipton was at some expense just then and was engaged in the process of "getting back his money" from Sharum, Fit & Co., Ltd., an exceedingly difficult task, so it seemed. Captain Tipton had come to his command in very nearly the same fashion four years earlier. Sharum said he rather liked the look of him, adding after a little circumlocution, that if he was in a position to invest, he thought it possible his partners would consent to his appointment.

If, therefore, Denis O'Hagan had happened to meet William Tipton over a gin cocktail before consenting to invest, he would not have been at the pains to puzzle things out now that he commanded the *Sphinx*.

During his first trip to the West, O'Hagan wondered why Tipton resigned; on his return with a deckload the *Sphinx* made it plain. Still, he remained in command, because, you see, he *had* resigned the mail service, *had* married Lucy and taken a share in the *Riddle*—the mad, wild Irish gossoon that he was.

This, then, was O'Hagan's second voyage and he thanked God he was nearing the end of it. Whether, when he

arrived, it would be possible to get out of this vessel and into another was see-sawing in his mind. He was tethered, in effect, by that investment he had made. Nearly five hundred cool British sovereigns were sunk in the *Sphinx*. He marched the bridge considering how he could recover them. Since the first day out from New York the ship's uneasy movements had become a burden to him. He had formulated no opinion why. Had he been asked, he probably would have said, "I don't like the feel of her," and that, after all, is no reason.

He also prayed they might have decent weather. Last voyage was millpond work; but now September had come in, there were signs of early equinoctials, and he didn't like that deckload they carried. Nor did the *Sphinx*. It made her sulky, in O'Hagan's phrase, which means that she cared very little whether she answered to his call, or turned sidelong to examine the seas.

She seemed to have acquired a habit of declination which rather amused her. Like a child with a new toy, she was always fiddling with it. At the perpendicular she openly scoffed. Any little gust, or helm action, was sufficient to tilt her. She swayed as she slouched towards the dawn, and Zephyr smiled upon her effrontery.

The stark Atlantic skies stooped over her, marking the line she drew. America had done with her and sent her forth packed to the bridge. Gentle winds from the sou'-west had blown upon her, without aim or concentration, pushing her channelwards. Sometimes they had provided a curtain for her; sometimes held it up so that the sea and the birds, the grampus and blackfish and porpoise which followed her, might learn new tricks of dive and pirouette.

For two thousand six hundred miles she had moved on her bee-line track towards the rising sun; her decks awash in the swell sent down to tend her; and for one thousand additional miles she must continue plodding. The ship of Sahara twists grumbling when too heavily laden, but refuses in spite of blows to rise; the ship of the Andean plateau speaks her mind in similar conditions; but the ship fashioned by man is inarticulate until her master leads her to the playground. Then she looks round and becomes explanatory—but the hour for words has gone by.

It was only a sluggish line the *Sphinx* had drawn hither

from New York. A little over two hundred miles a day, occasionally rather less. If a gale came her way she waited until it was tired—if it happened to blow in her face. She was one of the new carriers, of easy coal consumption and large capacity ; a ship which could be worked with a minimum of hands—those people of the deck and the Black squad who had dubbed her the *Riddle*, who knew precisely of what she was capable and damned the moment which had seen them sign on in her.

New York pushed her out on the last day of August, and on the 12th of September, 1907, she was still one thousand miles from Hamburg. To be precise her position when night closed in was 42° 21′ N., 12° 46′ W. Fastnet was a point one hundred and seventy-five miles distant on one bearing and the Lizard three hundred miles ahead on another, or, as O'Hagan put it, on a bearing N. 78° E. true. All this, of course, provided the ship's reckoning was correct.

From her bridge it was possible only to see discoloured water, seas which ran lumpily for no apparent reason, a dim green mistiness which increased as the day waned. Sailors know these as some of the signs that England and her Channel is near at hand ; fishermen, that they are in the neighbourhood of the Great Sole Bank, and that the Little Sole Bank lies farther down there in the greyness. Now O'Hagan and those with him on the bridge were not concerned with sole, but with the fact that the glass was falling still, that the thin mist had become rain, and the movements of the *Sphinx* unpleasant to recognise.

So night fell upon her ; the black night of an English autumn, moonless, starless, but pricked on all sides with phosphorescence . . . dull globes of it, comet-like flashes, and, wherever the sea broke or the ship's side touched it there fell stars and dim flame most wonderful to observe.

She moved swaying upon a sea which increased in lumpiness. She came up to the wind now on this side, now on the other, but the busy helmsman forced her back. The seas that boarded her struck fire out of the sodden cases and casks with which her well-decks were cumbered. Sometimes there came a jerk, sometimes a prolonged growl, sometimes a tin-pot squeal.

And over all and above all the wind hummed its majestic and impersonal diapason.

CHAPTER II

ALL HANDS AHOY!

Down by the edge of soundin's
That's where the sailors lie;
Flat on the floor like groundlin's
To hear the ships go by . . .
Lift their 'eads to 'ail us
Wave their arms awhile,
There the dead men watch us,
There the dead men smile.

At eight o'clock the *Sphinx*, when somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Great Sole Bank, performed that evolution which is known among sailors as "turning round to have a look at herself," but as it was black night only the phosphorescent swirl she made with her wake was to be seen. A green sea, though, which had been chasing her up the floor of the playground decided to make a sweep, leaped the rail and attacked the deckload. That was cowardly. On consideration, however, it was just the sort of thing sailors expect of the sea when a new hand has come to the wheel and he has not had time to rub the sleep out of his eyes.

Captain O'Hagan crossed from his place behind the dodger and said—

"Starboard there! What the devil are you doing with her?"

"'Elm's 'ard hover," said a personage from the slums of Whitechapel. "Comes up, she do, against 'er 'ellum, sir."

"Watch her then. Keep the wheel moving and don't let her run wild," said O'Hagan shortly.

"Bloomin' compass don't move," growled the man. "Looks as if it's glued."

"Then watch her head."

A crash in the well-deck, somewhere in that growing chaos they faced, recalled O'Hagan to his post of observation and Cockney was free to swear himself blind. He

was incompetent, that made him angry. He was afraid, that made him vociferent. The wheel was stiff—he damned the wheel. No one heard.

O'Hagan stood looking out into the night. Rather different to the old life was his thought; rather rough on Lucy if he brought her next trip and it was like this. He wondered. Then a sea rolled gurgling and cluttering past the rail as the *Sphinx* leaned down to greet it. "Hum! Going to blow . . . we seem to be in for dirt!" was O'Hagan's comment.

There was very little doubt on that score . . . but what in the world was that noise? Something adrift? He paused by the bridge rail listening. He could not see what it was. The world he faced was black and humming; but "Little Steel," as he was called, because he was big, was down there somewhere going the rounds. Presently he would be up with his report and the matter must be investigated. The noise settled into a steady thudding, a drumming which could be felt. O'Hagan sounded his call.

Then out of the blackness, wet to the eyes, came Little Steel with his burden of news.

"Deck cargo's adrift, sir. We must get all hands at it." He shouted the sentences, his head inclined against the wind.

"Forward or aft?" O'Hagan questioned at once.

"Forward, sir. Those big cases abreast of number two."

Number two was a hatch in the well across which the sea broke with monotonous regularity.

"Very good. Tell the mate and turn the hands out."

He stood after Steel had gone considering the meaning of this order. All hands! It sounded important, it conjured a rush of men who would presently arrive rubbing the sleep from their eyes, keen to discover what danger confronted them; but the number which would dash from the fo'c'sle on the *Sphinx* could be counted on the fingers of their captain's hands. Six men and two mates, eight. That was the total. There were also the folk known as "Idlers" on board ship, the cook, steward, and bo'sun-lamp-trimmer, who might be used at a pinch; but they were scarcely equipped to wrestle with cases of machinery adrift in that swirl. To grapple with weights it is necessary to know something of cargo work, something

of the movements of this she-devil they footed, something of the perils of darkness, thin rain and the punch of a sea.

Captain O'Hagan crossed to glance at the compass. Again he marched to windward and stood behind the dodger, peering over its drumming rim, ready to give orders if necessity arose.

They were in the track of vessels moving to and from the Atlantic. Ships from the north and south would presently be crossing them; yet, so far, no lights had been seen. Perhaps O'Hagan was more to the south than he supposed; perhaps it was thicker than appeared. These are matters on which it was impossible to dogmatise. They form part of the risk which is ever present at sea.

One thing, however, was plain to any intelligence. The sea was getting up, the wind had increased and the weather remained thick enough to make men swear. There was no fog yet, no mist; only that thin drizzle which blots out even the smoke-cloud which drives before a vessel running with the wind. Dirt, as sailors concisely put it.

This is scarcely a matter to cause anxiety to the commander of a vessel to which the quality of seaworthiness may be applied. It demands caution, a keen look-out and the use of the lead. O'Hagan was prepared to pit his wit against the weather. Dirt, *per se*, was not a condition of affairs for which he yearned; still, it arrives and must be met. There is glory in fighting a gale, personal glory in out-manœuvring seas rolling to smash; glory of the highest in circumventing the devilry of fog and mist and gale-driven seas—when a man can give his whole soul to the encounter. But here O'Hagan was handicapped from the outset and he knew it.

The ship swayed under him. She was top-heavy. Cargo which should have been beneath hatches cumbered the deck, and some portion of it was adrift. The danger was one which scarcely troubled O'Hagan at that moment; but it would become a burden if the gale increased, and would hammer for solution should those perils coincide with the conditions known as dirt.

At dusk the sky had flared its warning in lavish and magnificent colouring. Red, amber, green, mauve, purple —with fiery wisps smoking low across the dark; the sea a heated and luminous indigo, rolling and flecked with cressets of fire.

No sail anywhere, no land ; only the *Sphinx* climbing, lurching, inscrutable as she lolled in her foam-bed, the sole spectator of that masterpiece in scenic fury.

Lonely she lay—deserted even by the gulls and molly-mauks which had watched her gambols. She looked like a dray carrying three altars for sacrifice ; three cromlechs, one forward, one amidships, one aft—a plume of black smoke wind-driven over all. The horizon was dark because of that smoke. It was circumscribed for the same reason, yet was it the essence of her power.

Her decks were full of the water she spilled over them ; water not still but incessantly charging and recoiling, bashing at the rail, eddying and aswirl amidst the cases of her deckload. Since she left New York the seas had not ceased striving to lick her clean, to scrape the rust from her sides. Sometimes the sun had peeped to tinge the scene, sometimes the stars ; but generally the dull grey-green of the playground glazed her ugliness.

Now it was black night and the wash at either end of the bridge was dappled and rimmed with a phosphorescent glow which never remained still, which never burned long, which was born and slain by the lurchings she endured. With decks of steel, with houses and rails of steel, each sea that boarded her gave out the note of a monstrous drum. In the forecastle, when she plunged, the boom of it was accompanied by a squelching squeal as the ports acknowledged the sea pressure ; so, too, in the bridge section where lived the men who drove her, kept her fires going and questioned with each reverberating thud, " What in God's name is she up to now ? "

Yet no one came to ask. There were men on deck who knew their business and would call if necessity arose—still, that last lurching crash was something to remember. The engineer when he came off watch at eight o'clock registered the fact in his log in red ink. One never knows what it may be necessary to swear in evidence.

This gale which caused so much squirming was one of the sort for which the clippers of old time prayed when once the Western Islands were passed. Frequently they waited a week or more whistling for it—and when it came they ran smoking up Channel, revelling in the glory of it, the fiery wake they drew, the hum and throb of the wind roaring in rounded canvas. Had she stun's'ls ?—out with them ; would the fores'l pull better with the mains'l lifted

to windward ?—up with the weather clue ; roll up that crossjack, down with those stays'ls there . . . give her every stitch that will draw and keep your eyes skinned forward. . . . So she ripped before it, her crew awake, swearing the girls had got hold of her and were pulling her home. Fifteen, sixteen knots was her speed—no *seas* on her deck.

And here came the *Sphinx*—no sails set or required ; a monster carrying the freight of three clippers, laden to the hatches and, by the mercy of those who guide us, able also to carry a picking on deck. Eight knots was her pace ; a lumbering, punching, doddering eight, rising when MacAlister was on watch to nine ; her breath lying in great blobs of blackness upon the horizon obscuring the vision even of so shrewd a skipper as young O'Hagan.

Ten o'clock. The man at the wheel left his place and struck it—four mellow strokes ; but no answer came from forward—neither the cry of Lascar nor British Jack, for were not " all hands " busy in that cauldron " securing cargo " ? No one on the look-out, no one coming to relieve the wheel, no officer marching the bridge—O'Hagan alone, keen in spite of his all day vigil, keen in spite of the three days and nights he had seen in harness since the weather began to mutter ; and a Cockney soul tired of wheel-twisting, urgent for relief.

Again the man struck the bell—this time with bottled anger to assist him. Then he looked out of the wheel-house and shouted into space, " I wants relief ! 'Ow much longer d'ye expeck a man to stand grindin' 'ere . . . ? " He added other comment which gave force to his argument—fireworks he would have termed them, things to which a commander takes exception.

O'Hagan came from his corner at once and advanced to the wheel-house faster than was consistent with dignity. The *Sphinx* had lurched to aid him, that is all ; but it added sting to his tongue, if that were necessary.

" Don't you let me hear your voice like that again. Don't you let me hear you damning either ship or crew on my bridge. The men are at work securing cargo. Take hold of the wheel and wait till you are relieved. . . . "

" I will—wiv a bloomin' 'ook ! " said the helmsman in the diction he had learned. He gave the wheel a twist and stood with folded arms, ready to " down tools," ready

to " strike," as he would have termed it, ready to go the whole hog in defence of his " rights " as he understood them.

O'Hagan moved round to the wheel-house door and entered. He was quiet, for he knew his strength ; he was still, for he knew how to use it.

" Take hold of that wheel ! " he said in the tone of one who is prepared to go all lengths.

" 'Oo the 'ell are you—wiv yer tike 'old . . . ? "

Cockney squared to attack, but O'Hagan took him in his arms and planted him with a thud against the casing —" Take hold ! " he ordered. " No back talk or I will twist the soul out of you. Quick ! by the Lord I mean it —get hold ! "

The man drew breath with a sob ; but he obeyed. He knew strength when he met it. When it was too considerable to oppose, he knuckled down, as he expressed it. He looked up at the big form standing over him.

" A'right," he gave back, " that's one to you. My turn'll come." His voice shook.

" Look to your helm—meet her ! " said his captain and passed to his place on the bridge. He put his whistle to his lips and blew one call.

Then a great sea rolled over the quarter and came gurgling and eddying through the alley-ways.

The *Sphinx* swayed before this attack. She seemed of two minds, uncertain whether to pick herself up again or to lie down and take her ease ; undecided whether it was worth while getting up only to be knocked over again, whether . . .

Barlow, the mate, came up the bridge ladder and fought his way to windward.

" One of the men has got knocked down," he shouted. " I've taken him aft. His leg's broken."

" Who is it ? "

" Olsen, sir. He was coming to relieve the wheel."

" Very well. We shall have to set it," O'Hagan decided, then added, " Can you set it ? "

" Afraid I'm not much use—I got my hand jammed, you see . . . right, too, sir—a bit awkward, I'm afraid," the mate explained.

" Got it dressed ? " O'Hagan shouted, lifting his voice as the wind set the dodger thrashing. " Got it dressed ? " he repeated, as the mate stared.

"Oh—yes. That's all right, sir; but you see it would rather botch me at surgery."

"Of course. Well, I must go down. I don't like the look of things out there," he indicated the quarter whence the wind roared, "but Steel can't get away. . . . Yes—I must go down." In his throat he anathematised the necessity. "Anyhow, keep a good look out and have that beast relieved from the wheel. She steers like a barn in his hands. Course is S. 85° E. No lights in sight . . . cargo secure yet?"

"No, sir—and won't be," said the mate. "Some of it's gone," he added in the voice of one thankful for small mercies.

"Overboard?"

"Clean washed out of her—half the port side of her with it."

"The devil! Well, note it in the log. I will get back as soon as I can." Again he shrugged over the necessity. "Surgery, by the Lord! Dressing abrasions and setting limbs in this kitchen. . . . Whew! She is rather a beauty."

O'Hagan was wrong there. She was not "rather" anything. She was on the contrary, as the mate at this moment was announcing, a hog, a scatter-brained, idiotic trollop that didn't know enough to keep herself warm. He embroidered the idea in phrases which should have sobered the trollop, but she answered him with a sea which spread gurgling to the bridge.

And when she had rolled herself free she hung quivering with the weight of that sea; tilting a little, sidling a little, puffing under the black canopy at that solid top-dressing she had brought on herself.

The mate thrust his head over the dodger and hailed the forward well where Little Steel and five others strove to rectify the blunders of Whitehall.

"Below there!"

"Hel-lo!"

"Anyone damaged . . . all hands there?"

"Right-O! All aboard the lugger," came back in reply.

The mate moved muttering into shelter.

"I wish to God it was day," he said in his teeth.

CHAPTER III

KISMET

Squitt'rin' through a blizzard
Blowin' just fer fun ;
Lookin' out fer Lizard
Feelin' just on done ;
Blinded in a stone black night
As come to 'elp us in ;
So we crawled by Bishop Light
An' never see the glim.

Dawn on the morning of September 14th, 1907. A ragged split in the eastern greyness, low down and tinted in the yellow-green of the playground. Wind steadily increasing, sea more lumpy than at nightfall—a wilderness of hills all charging up Channel, all pressing after that *Sphinx*, which a night's harrying had failed to hide.

Human endurance flagging, too, and in the face of it Nature alert flourishing the whip ; the god of sea and wind vigorous, spurring for triumph.

Gaps were revealed to that complacent dawn—gaps which the sea had torn.

Down there before the bridge were yawning plates, rails twisted and buckled and flattened to give entrance to the sea. Winches battered, iron twined and bent into a fantastic image of pipes and plates ; guiding rods plucked bodily away, drumheads awry. The litter here of torn cases, casks there which had disgorged their contents upon the steel of the decks and made them effectually slippery. Tallow, resin, chemicals, ropes, staves—all spluttering about in a gurgling sloppiness. The turret fronts were knee deep in it, the hatch covers torn and unbattened.

And abaft the bridge was a replica.

Work here for a gang armed with scrapers and buckets, with shovels and nippers and crowbars. Work for men with screwjacks, chisels, hammers and the serene atmosphere of a graving dock. But over it all was a vigilant

and scornful enemy ; the sea in a rollicking mood, laughing at man's tin-pot efforts ; laughing at his armoury of steel and girder and rod and tie, scoffing at the whole thin-strung gamut of defence swaying and plunging in the trough of the seas.

Work for an army of fitters if anything like symmetry or protection were desired—and here crawled seven sea-wrung sailormen, German and English—Bottle-fillers of the Nation. Men these who should have been taking soundings in that maze of banks they traversed, who should have been divided into two watches, one asleep while the other worked ; men who should have been alert, not dead with fatigue. Navigation was the necessity here, and to aid navigation when stars and sun are blotted out soundings are essential. A definite track of them. A punctuated, systematic sequence of them, so that the bridge may judge by the " casts " whither it is heading in the murk.

But here was no time for soundings. All hands, including now the ship's idlers, were pressed into the business of repairing damages, re-covering hatches, battening and fighting to keep out " of the cellar " which yawned, licking lips over the morsel it visualized.

Cold men, hard as nails, but sodden, ready to sleep in spite of the sea, worked there in the gloom. Cargo ? Let it rip and be damned to it, so that it went clear of the side. Cases of machinery for reaping the fields ? Well, down there they would lie unoiled, untended, unpainted, a harbour for crustaceans, a holdfast for limpets or barnacles —who cared what ? Casks of tallow ? Lord ! that was the last thing in maladroit lading. Too heavy to lumber bodily through the gaps, rotund, busy as a ball on a lurching deck, swift as a plummet to the laws of gravity. A whole regiment had vanished, but some in fragments and the slush-spattered decks stood on the side of Force, on the side of the gods who waited, Neptune angry, Pluto brooding, all the galaxy who stood arrayed against man in his fight with the everlasting sea.

And to them came Hermes with his message—

" *Lash and spare not ! They are tired, wearied of effort. They no longer seek of the sea-bed evidence of their progress. The islands are near—they do not see them. The rocks stand sentry—they heed them not. They are torn and battered and water gushes in upon them from rents which the*

sea hath made. Some lie in their beds with straight, stiff wood to hold their limbs in place. They are concerned, O Jove, to tend their wounded, forgetting the crowding perils which encompass them. . . .

" Therefore, let the winds blow ! Call to the rain god, call to the mist god . . . to the god of subtlety and stealth call. Let them prepare ! "

Noon saw men working waist high in a spume which never left them, which was their habitat, even as its companion the rain. Sodden ? Oh, yes. Wrists raw with the chafe of oilskins, knees stiff with salt-water boils, lips cracked, hands cracked, great sea-cuts in the bends of toe and finger . . . who of them for a champion ? Who ready to stand and fight who could scarcely crawl for batterings . . . who had become quiet, a little stupid, perhaps, a little dazed by the wind-god's song, by the sea-god's drone ? Who of them awake enough to see what passed ?

Then words came on the wings of the gale—" Get up here a couple of you. Flags ready ! " and they straggled to reply.

" Somethin' comin' . . . ? "

" Somethin' in sight ! Lord send it's a mailboat ! "

A mailboat it was, blue in the distance to leeward, her great bulk pushing through the seas in a smother of spray ; but steady, in comparison, as a lighthouse.

" Get up our number," O'Hagan gave as an order. " Get out the signal, ' I desire to communicate.' Quick ! There are other things to say . . . bend on and hoist ! "

But the flags presently flicking aloft were end on—unreadable. Only the new force was possible here—wireless, the work of that glorious Italian. But for the Tramp there is no wireless, no submarine method of signalling,* only the flags, the old-world flags of Nelson's and Drake's fine leisure.

" Gone ! " said one of the men, " wivout so much as damn yer."

They stood for a moment together upon the bridge ; they stood expectant, perhaps questioning whether that racing ship would turn about and come to examine their distress. They lowered the ensign to half-mast and remained watching.

* An instrument set in the bow for picking up signals sent out by Lightships and Lighthouses.

Out of the greyness of the north she had come, into the greyness of the south she disappeared . . . a mailship which would kiss the eastern seas.

"Down flags and grog oh!" said the mate as he came to them. "She was beyond us. Couldn't see in this blather."

"Naa . . . not 'er couldn't," one answered.

"Lookin' fer wots in front of 'im," said another, "not wot's be'ind. I wish the mate of 'er 'ad me by the bloomin' scruff."

"Ja—me too, mein friendt," said a Hamburger. "Go on, get down mit ze flag an' gome for a shmile."

Back from the bridge they clustered, entered again the waist, crept by staunchion and holdfast to the alley-way, where, in a sack beside McAlister's bunk, was the "shmile," ready to the chief's unwounded hand.

They stood on a steampipe whence the platform had been ripped, dodging the sprays, leaping before seas, and in turn swallowed their portion. Good? Lord! it made men of them—for half an hour. Then again came inertia, sleep, weariness, bemused faculties, the strain and torture of bruises *sans* rest.

. . . .

Three o'clock, four o'clock saw them still fighting, still dragging at lashings, passing along planks, nailing, battening, sheathing, while light remained. Then in the half dusk, a squall towering over them, Bill Smith lost his hold and came, heaped up, to leeward—as though he dived.

And to greet him was the steel of ravaged bulwarks through which the sea grinned and sent specimens for tasting.

Small hope for man in such straits, small chance even where hospitals stand ready and surgeons live at the end of a telephone wire. Here mere waste of time, waste—waste . . . yet was he disentangled from the cage which had received him and carried through leaping seas, shoulder high to the cabin. And then for Captain O'Hagan's dexterity, for his sense of touch, the fine drawn essentials of surgery in the hands of a man a week without rest—if by rest you understand sleep in bed between sheets or blankets and no soul-torture of doubt to disturb you, no drum-note to awake you to the swish of seas tumbling in the well.

Snatches of sleep come to all men, on the bridge, at the

wheel, aloft—after a certain consumption of vitality and expenditure of force. The wind roar alone is sufficient to bring drowsiness, the sting of it on face and eyes and mouth a certain draw; but when to that is added the sodden misery of wet clothes, of cold, of seas which are always struggling to flatten man out, then in spite of all hazards sleep comes in snatches.

Necessarily in face of these handicaps Bill Smith failed to recover consciousness. So they strapped him to the settee and got out on deck to face what came.

. . . .

Darkness came. An intolerable drone of wind and patter of rain and hail—perhaps sleet? Who knows?

Darkness came. Darkness which could be felt. Seven o'clock came, and with it a cup of tea steaming from the donkey-room where men had brewed it.

O'Hagan sat against an angle of the bridge beside the dodger. A canvas sling supported him, and about his middle was a lashing of rope.

"Here you are, sir, try this cup," said the voice of one who brought it.

"Eh? Eh? What's — that?" O'Hagan started visibly, shocked because of this drowsiness, a lapse which all men might see.

"Tea, sir—a good strong cup. . . ."

"Ah . . . thanks. Yes . . . by Jove though, I believe I dozed. Barlow there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did I doze?" he questioned again, "did you notice whether I dozed?"

"No, sir. Why, a minute ago you told me to get a cast of the lead."

"Aye, of course . . . did you get it?"

"I wasn't able," said the mate. "The machine is washed out of her."

O'Hagan received this with the same apathy that had been noticeable in his acceptance of the tea. It was plain to see that he was worn out, yet because he could not insist on this aspect, Barlow decided not to touch it, but droned on, his head tilted to assist the words—"She's a beast with this new loadline, in any case, but with a deckload thrown in, she's dangerous," he raved. "I've been in her since she was launched . . . but this is my last trip. I'll have to find another job. . . ."

"Eigh! That shouldn't be hard, Barlow. . . ."

"No, sir—no, I agree there. It's easier than it was, if your papers are clean." He returned doggedly to the plaint that the sounding machine had been swept out of her. He announced that a fact of that sort spoke volumes to a man who knew the ship before, "Why, sir, that gale off Hatteras the trip before you joined us would have blown this to a standstill; but she didn't kick up this dido."

"Pick up who?"

"Didn't make this mess, sir," Barlow growled, his back to the wind as a squall broke screaming over them.

"No, no . . . Yes, it is a mess," O'Hagan assented. "I shall take her into Falmouth if the weather is no better at daybreak. How are the pumps going?"

"Holding our own, McAlister tells me, no more."

"Hum! And you think she was dryer in the old days, eh?"

"Not a doubt of it."

"If we had a receiver in her nose* I shouldn't worry," O'Hagan admitted. "I can't understand why we have seen nothing. Gad!" he faced the grey-haired mate with a gust of anger, "it's rather a change from the Eastern Mail."

"I'll bet it is," Barlow agreed. "I should like to have the Plaster Saint lashed down on our main hatch to see it."

"The Plaster who?"

"Saint, sir . . . Board of Trade, you know."

"Aye! I had forgotten. Getting a bit fuzzy, I suppose." He crossed to his corner and stood staring over the dodger. He had heard Jimmy Barlow on this theme before and knew every anathema he could utter. He refused to be bothered with Plaster Saints. The ship held him. Straight ahead was the smoke-cloud they made but could not see. Sometimes the blunt angle of the ship's bow soared high as a sea creamed past them, sometimes it sank as though the *Sphinx* had decided to take a header and end matters. She rolled as she burrowed and she rolled as she climbed. Rails down she scooped at the seas and the seas answered her, flicking pieces from her, whittling her for assault.

* Submarine signal apparatus.

Suddenly O'Hagan stumbled against the dodger and in a moment he understood that again he had dozed. That was terrible. He dared not give way to it, he dared not give way. He said it in his teeth, his brain dizzy at the notion. He called to the mate and shouted behind a curved hand precisely as though no interval had elapsed—"That handicaps us——"

Barlow twisted to hear more plainly. O'Hagan repeated the phrase and added—"We shall have to stop her and use the hand lead. We have one, I suppose?"

"Yes—yes . . . I see—yes, in my room, sir."

"Better send Steel up here and bring it into the chart-room. I must work her up . . . ought to be in touch with the Bishop or St. Agnes before this. If we could get a few soundings it might tell us something."

The mate moved off acknowledging the necessity, but dubious of the result. Steel climbed to the bridge and O'Hagan was free to examine his charts.

With compasses and parallel ruler, with bemused faculties and the stiffness brought by contact with wind and cold, he went over their course from that point which figured in his brain as "my departure." He stooped over the crisp figured sheet examining the dots and splashes of red which mark the lighthouses and stood back tapping with his pencil.

"Bishop Rock abeam at six-fifty," that was his thought, "distance about eight miles." It was now nearly eight o'clock and no light had been seen. "Curious!"

That might mean they were farther south than he imagined, or it might mean that a haze lay over the land and the lights were not visible at full range. Still, eight miles! Soundings were necessary . . . but the machine was gone . . . and . . .

The mate entered and found him leaning over the chart, his face very near his hands; but he looked up quickly and gave the result of his calculations.

Barlow agreed that there should not be much haze with this wind. "Much more likely we are bein' set to the southard, sir. If we had been 'in any' * we should have come across vessels bound west," he argued, "but we've seen none."

This could not be denied. That they were off the line

* Inside the course.

of shipping was plain. "Still," O'Hagan decided, "I shall not haul in. We shall make the Lizard anyhow. We can't pass that unless we are in mid-channel. Try a cast of the lead. I'll stop her. You will have to get all hands on it."

He returned to the bridge while the two mates, with those who were fit, crept aft and stood clinging to the rigging until the ship no longer had way. Then, fumbling over the torn rails, scrambling under lashings they had placed, they approached the lee quarter, cast the lead and stood to haul it inboard.

Somebody chanted a minor song of the sea as they pulled and the sea leaped up to look upon its children. Not quiet yet? Still moving . . . still squirming? Phit! The sea sent a messenger to brush them away; but the *Sphinx* dodged it, wallowing in the splash it made. It drenched those sodden workers, made them clutch and gasp and swear, but presently the song broke out again and the lead came home.

They moved towards the bridge carrying it and, being gifted with the eyesight of all wild things, reached it just as a roller creamed under them, pushing the stern high, high, as though the *Sphinx* had at last made up her mind for the dive; then with a sulky inclination stooped and scooped the crest as a trophy. For fifteen minutes they had remained without the turn of a propeller; now, stung to life by the salt sea tang the small group climbed back to the bridge and handed their report. At this ebullition of the sea they jeered. Were they not wet already?

"Fifty-two fathoms, sand and shell," said the mate. "Two casts in the hour will be about our limit; and now you have it, sir, it may be fifty-two or fifty-three or fifty-one. The Lord knows which."

Plainly the mate looked upon the precaution as high-flown nonsense, suitable if you had a machine and need not stop; but useless in such conditions as those they faced. A waste of time and strength. O'Hagan passed into the chart-room in his company. They carried the arming for reference. Sand and shell, fine and course sand mixed with broken shell. That was their guide.

They searched along the track they had come for this magic figure, 52—*s, sh,* and found it. In a dozen places O'Hagan found it. Off Ushant was 52—*s, sh,* off Bishop, off the Wolf 51—*s, sh,* off Lizard 52—*s, sh,* in mid-channel.

O'Hagan replaced the chart, covered the light and went out.

" A solitary cast like that," said the mate, " is no guide. And we're all dead beat."

" I admit it. Still, we had to see whether it could be worked. No—it's too dangerous as things are and—and the men must get a rest." O'Hagan spoke with new briskness. He turned to the second mate. " Away and get a sleep, Mr. Steel. We shall want you up here at eight bells. Mr. Barlow, if you care to take an hour or so in the chart-room do so. I will take a spell up here."

" Sir," said the chief, " I'll keep my watch. I'm not dead beat as you are . . . better take a few hours yourself sir—she can't hurt this side of mornin' . . . won't you go down, sir ?

" Thanks, Barlow. No—I guess I'll stay."

. . . .

Nine o'clock. Less wind, less rain, a more definite haze over those shallows which block the Atlantic's sweep, hold up its swell and break its seas. Nine o'clock. A curious, far-away sound. Somebody striking a bell somewhere. Somebody as certainly standing near. Somebody . . . " Good Lord ! What's that ? "

O'Hagan, alert again and vigorously asserting the fact, glared at the man who stood over him.

" That you, Barlow ? . . . why, where . . ."

" You are dead beat, sir. She shook you out of it easy as shellin' peas—better get inside and lie down, sir. . . ."

O'Hagan staggered to his feet and stood swaying.

" Any lights about . . . anything in sight ? " he questioned.

" No, sir—nothing. She's to the southard, in mid-channel, like as not. It won't do for us all to be knocked out together."

Again O'Hagan swayed and would have fallen, but Jimmy Barlow gripped his arm and supported him.

" Lord ! I believe I am done this time ! " O'Hagan grumbled. " Luck, eh ? "

" Get a sleep, sir. Five or six hours would do you no end of good and there's nothing to hinder it, unless, of course," said the mate, " you don't care to leave me in charge of her."

" Barlow," said O'Hagan, " I didn't think of that—but I'm captain you see, and I want to be on deck when we

make the—the land. It's thicker, isn't it? Yes, I'm sure of it—and there's less wind. That's better. Well, you will have to sound our horn if it gets worse. You know the—the course, eh?" He spoke with the thickened accent of one stupid, drugged, drunken for want of sleep. Then quite suddenly he collapsed.

Barlow and a man he summoned carried him without struggles to the chart-room. They removed his oilskins and sea-boots. He made no effort to stay them. They placed him upon a settee which ran beside one bulkhead. They pulled up the weather board and fixed it, placed a pillow beneath his head, covered him, put out the light and shut the door upon him.

Then again Jimmy Barlow went on deck and took charge.

. . . .

Ten o'clock. The wind failing somewhat and backing to the south. Low-strung clouds racing like smoke from the same quarter, spume still mingled with the drizzle but lacking sting, lacking the shot-like precision which makes it deadly. No ships in sight, no lights of any character. A rather drowsy hour following so close on the burr of the gale. A rather somnolent personage at the wheel, another at the look-out . . . nothing in sight, nothing to keep them alert, the man on the look-out obviously dozing.

Barlow moved up and down using his glasses. He had better have trusted his naked vision. There is nothing which tires a tired man more completely than the unintelligent use of night glasses. No Bishop Rock, no St. Agnes; and now, by the Lord Harry! no Wolf. They were out of the range of everything—clean out. It was thick, but there were no fog signals. Nothing but their own brazen outcry, and that fell flat, as though it were sounded in a well.

Barlow plodded on. Up and down, down and up. The bridge swayed to port, then swayed to starboard. It hung longer to this latter. It gave him a push which settled him in a corner behind the dodger and for ten minutes Jimmy Barlow dozed.

The steam whistle brayed automatically over them, and every time it brayed there came a stir of activity at each corner of the bridge and in the wheel-house. Then after a season, perhaps at eleven o'clock, it ceased to bray, and

there sounded afar off the ghost of a signal, a dim, sunken note, first high, then low.

Neither Jimmy Barlow nor the look-out heard that signal—if signal it were. The man grinding at the wheel was perhaps the most alert of the trio. You cannot hold a kicking wheel and sleep without learning that you have slept. Yet dozing or alert the man at the wheel heard nothing.

The *Sphinx*, true to her calling, plunged wallowing in a sea which no longer stung her. She drew a wake once more. Something had happened to the sea. . . . Up there for the fraction of a minute surely was a red glow. No ? The fog moved denser to give it the lie. It hid the light precisely as it lapped the coast with cotton-wool. It was that which deadened the sob of the horns.

Nine knots ! McAlister on watch for a dollar, pushing her round, getting the last ounce out of her steam. The black squad who worked with him shut down out of reach of the sea, hot when those *matelot* people shivered, dry when they were wet. " Give her beans, sons ! Good for you—walk her through it for the Ratcliff 'Ighway, walk her along ! "

And the *Sphinx* answered to their call in strangely still seas. A swell existed which caused her to lurch and sway as before ; but seas no longer broke heavily on deck.

The men sheltering to leeward of the fidleys might have explained the difference ; but they did not perceive it. Like the sea and the *Sphinx* and the horn which had brayed over them, all those who were on watch seemed to doze.

. . . .

Twelve o'clock. Eight bells, thank God ! The hour when men go below and turn in for honest sleep, the sleep they have earned.

The man who steered leaned out of his window and struck it. There followed an echo, very precise, very near. Something aroused Jimmy Barlow, the grey-haired mate, and as he stumbled from his seat a sound quivered which for ten minutes had been audible. A horn giving two notes—high, low, but far off, very far off.

Jimmy Barlow decided this as he crossed swiftly to the compass to localize it. He was confused. His senses were dim. " Far off," he said again, " and where away ? " He waited two minutes. No sound disturbed him. Again

two minutes, and then once more the signal he expected—but out there, to the south, far, far in the south.

He twisted the binnacle top and took a rough bearing of the sound. "South-east . . . absurd!" said Jimmy Barlow. "That's caused by the fog. Deflection there anyhow . . . shouldn't be surprised if we hear it somewhere else presently."

But he heard it again as before.

The *Sphinx* pounded on her way insensible to the portents as were her crew.

Dim, far off, blurred, the signal fell on the ears of the listening mate. His faculties were coming to his aid. He became alert. Vast possibilities loomed suddenly in the haze through which they bored. What if it were true? What if there were no deflection? "Then, then . . . oh! by the Lord, no."

And still the *Sphinx* pounded on her way insensible to the portents which stood over her.

Barlow came from the compass burdened by a new thought. It occurred to him that a fresh note was in being, something connected with their march through space. He listened, leaning over the bridge rail and heard a rush as of waves breaking; a long drawn hiss which could only be made by a vessel drawing astern, or by the surf.

He moved to the whistle and pulled the cord. The blast it gave produced an echo—plainly near, plainly overhead.

Then Jimmy Barlow recognised his danger and jumped into the wheel-house to avert it. "Wheel over, there! Hard a-port . . . over with her . . . over with her!"

The helmsman seemed to consider his officer mad, but Jimmy Barlow reached the bridge, and at one turn set the engine-room telegraph at full speed astern. Then again he vanished, this time to call his commander.

The helmsman leaned on the wheel grumbling anathemas. "'Ow long was ee to bloomin' well keep 'er 'ard hover? The bloomin' mate was like a bloomin' paper man in a squall . . ."; but the mate in question entered the chart-room and shook O'Hagan without ceremony. "Quick, sir . . . out on deck!" he shouted. "She's head first into somethin' . . . head first. Yes, and by God! it's my fault. I dozed."

He came out to watch the *Sphinx* swing. The engines

no longer throbbed ; but they were not going astern. In the arena where steam is lord, it is recognised that you cannot switch from full speed ahead to full speed astern without playing the devil with your machine. That is a *sine qua non*—therefore the mode is more leisurely.

And Jimmy Barlow stood to watch her swing, imagining she was slowing ; imagining brick walls, reefs, shoals—waiting for the blow. His eyes were blinded now, but not by sleep. He stood gripping the rail, his teeth clenched. "What lay out there in the mist ahead of them ? What were the odds that she would twist clear."

There were no odds.

The *Sphinx* answered by swinging him past unseen cliffs ; cliffs which seemed to stand over the ship, but without touching her. The god of the underworld had done his work well. The cliffs were wrapped in mist. The rocks which lay off them were decently screened. Nothing visible to scare a man from his place on the bridge.

She came round in a smother of spume and, before the engines had mastered her, butted at the rocks and suddenly stopped. Butted and in a moment lay over guzzling the brine, stretching after that star which in her lifetime it had been impossible to win.

. . . .

A solitary rocket soared presently into the fog and broke in a shower high up as the *Sphinx* tilted sidelong upon her bed.

Phase the Second

The Sentence

CHAPTER I

A CHALLENGE

The Council Hall is dim, is dim,
A Judge sits glum to claw,
Some lawyers stand the case to trim,
A Sailor waits in awe . . .

For you have no right to get on the rocks,
And you have no call to collide,
You're supposed to keep on top with your box,
And never to sleep when outside.

THE Jake Hall of Notherton was engaged, therefore on January the fifteenth there commenced in an adjacent building the trial of one of the Nation's Bottle-fillers for the loss of his ship.

It was not termed a trial by those who took part in it, but an inquiry, which sounds better; and the defendant was called neither a Bottle-filler, which suggests a publican, nor a captain, which suggests an officer. They called him Mr. Denis O'Hagan, master of the S.S. *Sphinx*, otherwise were no vagaries.

The room was close. A commendable twilight brooded between browned windows. The men who stood and sat at the long table, which occupied so much floor-space, partook of their surroundings. They seemed drowsy, tired, ready to scuttle off home and get to bed; but that was impossible. The hour forbade sleep, although it encouraged it. The men remained fumbling with questions, seeking to discover the cause of this catastrophe which had brought them together.

Ranged on two sides of the room were chairs standing against the wall in readiness for those members of the public who desired to be present at the hearing; but with the exception of a small cluster of witnesses grouped together immediately behind the lawyers engaged on the case, no one had sought admission.

The room was a court without any of its appurtenances. One entered it from a blind alley abutting on a main street

where electric cars rumbled in a yellow gloom. The door was guarded by two policemen who were prepared, if required, to admit any member of the public who wished to enter. But there were no robes, no gowns, no wigs, no scandal—nothing savouring in any degree of the law's omnipotence ; nothing to attract a man from the street ; nothing to thrill him ; nothing to warrant the production of pictures or great headlines in the papers he read.

Yet a captain in the British Merchant Service stood on trial here for the loss of his ship. Officially, the proceedings were known as "An Inquiry," which at all events suggests that calm state of suspended judgment which it is our boast at post-prandial speeches to depict. Yet when you consider the punishments meted out, Trial seems the more appropriate designate. At all events, that may be taken as the view of Captain O'Hagan and Jimmy Barlow, master and mate of that box of engineering mysteries known now only as a star on the British Wreck Chart, but once as the S.S. *Sphinx*.

Now there were two magistrates sitting with assessors to hear this matter. The junior was a retired schoolmaster, a scholar of definite attainments ; but the senior, whose province it would be to pass judgment, was one of those persons who, had he been questioned, would have admitted that he knew nothing of the sea. It is entirely credible also that he had but a bowing acquaintance with the law. He was accustomed, as was his *confrere*, to a prompter who sat, when he was adjudicating on the drunk and disorderly, as town clerk, to advise him ; and when he was hearing inquiries, as twin assessors—men grown old in the service of the sea.

As a matter of fact, the chairman, sitting in the centre seat on this bench, was one of those personages whom authority had knighted because, in a world of competition, he had succeeded in amassing a fortune by selling knick-knacks. Inadvertently he had, of course, expunged quite a number of smaller knickknack sellers. To be quite accurate he was an importer who knew what the nation wanted and provided it without stint ; but he knew no more of the sea, the men who navigate the ships, and the cargoes they carry than may be gleaned from an acquaintance with bills of lading.

In theory, of course, the two nautical assessors were

here to put him right on all technical points, precisely as a town clerk sat beneath him to advise on questions of law in those other courts over which he presided. But theory is a jug which in practice rarely holds water. It is impossible to put into the mind of a man, be he never so able, the knowledge which it has taken a lifetime for another to acquire. He can but assimilate a part, even from assessors who are gifted. What he may gather from those who are somnolent may be known, perhaps, at the Bar of a Court which, one day, all men will attend.

It was a grey day. Outside there was fog—the heavy, yellow fog of a great city; inside there was fog also—the fog physical and fog mental; fog which made dim the lights and rolled oppression on faculties already tired by argument.

The assessors especially seemed to find the conditions provocative. One of them was very old and very tired; the other hale, but a trifle deaf and without experience of service in Tramps of the *Sphinx* class. He seemed inclined indeed to resent the fact that Tramps exist. He punctuated the inquiry with staccato cries of, "What? What?"—hand at ear. And O'Hagan faced this tribunal seeking to explain conditions which had weighed him down when in command of his ship.

It is always difficult to reproduce tragedy in the bland environment of a court; but in so stagnant an atmosphere the difficulty was intensified. For that reason, then, if for no other, O'Hagan was once more on his feet seeking to make clear why he had not been on the bridge at the time of the catastrophe. He was in the midst of a detailed explanation when the elder of the two assessors leaned back in his chair and quite confidently gave vent to a sound which is usually known as snoring. His white beard was lifted, his head rolled.

O'Hagan turned upon him with a note of annoyance which seemed to suggest that he had lost sight of the fact that he was a Bottle-filler.

"What is the use of explaining technicalities to an assessor who is asleep?" he cried out.

"What? What?" exclaimed his brother assessor, with hand curved to convey sound.

Somebody pinched the sleeper, who awoke with a jerk, and O'Hagan's adviser said—"I really must call attention to the fact that . . ."

Then the chairman, wriggling judicially with finger in ear, intervened with bland comprehension. "Yes, yes," he said, "the atmosphere of the court is heavy—a—unwarrantably heavy . . . and—a—to open the windows would make it no better. I shall make a note of it and send it to the—a—proper authority when I have done with this case."

He leaned forward when he had pronounced this formula, and scribbled with a quill which spluttered. Then he looked up and said brusquely to O'Hagan :—

"You were saying something about it being impossible to remain on duty longer than you did. I don't pretend to understand why—yet ; but I have no doubt from what has fallen—a—hitherto, that you committed a blunder in leaving the bridge when you did."

"You seem to think," O'Hagan urged with a gust of impatience, "that a man can remain on watch for ever. You take the view that if he goes down to rest he is guilty of carelessness or worse. I can't see how you can expect a man to remain keen after twenty-four hours of it—and I had been on the bridge for thirty-two without a break. I was not fit for more. I could have slept where I stood—easily."

He might perhaps have added, "as your assessor slept just now," for he was very young ; but at that moment the door opened to admit a member of the public who had heard of this trial.

A young girl, slim, dark, quietly dressed, entered and sat down on a chair by the wall. As on the two previous days so now she was the sole occupant of that row of chairs. She looked small, microscopic, pathetic, against that dim expanse of wall which shadowed her, well-nigh blotting her out. Her entrance had caused but little stir ; but it was sufficient to attract O'Hagan. He paused in the swing of argument and for a moment seemed to contemplate going to her aid. Then the constable who had introduced her sidled out, moving with immense caution in heavy boots and the door closed behind him—*sans* sound.

Even in the gloom of that court it was possible to see that a glance passed between the two young people—the man who stood to speak and the girl who came to hear ; but the magistrates and assessors engaged on this inquiry had sterner business to consider than any usually known to woman.

O'Hagan drew himself up and resumed, a new note evident—" I could have slept where I stood, sir. Faith ! I mean it. Sometimes I may tell you that is the only form of sleep that comes to a British shipmaster—but on this occasion it was impossible. I left the ship in charge of my chief mate—a man fully qualified to relieve me, qualified by the Board of Trade and by experience. I don't wish to shuffle out of my responsibility, or to throw the burden from my shoulders to those of the mate. He did his best in very difficult conditions. He, too, was dead beat. I don't suppose I could have done any better. I might have done worse—God knows . . . but I wish to point out that there are limits to physical endurance. I had reached those limits. You might as well have stuck a paper man on the bridge as left me there after thirty-two hours. . . ."

" What ? What ? " questioned the assessor who was deaf.

The chairman raised a sleek hand carrying a signet and a diamond which gleamed.

" I don't think you do yourself any service, captain," he remarked frowningly, " by giving way to temper here. I would urge you very seriously to leave explanation and —a—generalisations, on one side and give your attention to the questions which are put to you. . . ."

" I want you to understand the position, sir," quoth the Bottle-filler. " I want you to recognise that a man is not made of cast-iron because he happens to be in command. I agree, in the light of what transpired, that it might have been better for us if I had taken a spell off sooner, and come up fresh to make my landfall. But we had been in difficulties "—he phrased it so with calm intonation. " You see, our deck cargo had broken adrift and I was rather put to it to know how to secure it . . . what I could anyhow, and save the ship. . . ."

" I admit," he said argumentatively, " that I might have left this to the mate, but I was anxious. You can never be certain what will happen when your deckload is slithering about. Then two of our poor devils had got smashed up while trying to secure it . . . and I had to mend them. It isn't easy to explain what all this means ; but you must understand it was blowing a gale and the seas were sweeping over us. A man could not move across the deck without running the risk of being washed overboard or knocked silly. . . ."

"No life-lines rigged, captain?" questioned the aged assessor.

"No, sir. At least not of the sort you suggest. You can't fix life-lines on decks cumbered by cases of machinery and casks of chemicals. . . ."

"I don't admit that," quoth the assessor, drawing one hand slowly down his face to conceal a yawn.

"Nor do I," asserted the deaf assessor. "We found it essential to fix them always in my day."

"Did you carry deckloads in the P. & O.?" came crisply from the Bottle-filler.

"What? What?"

O'Hagan repeated his question and the assessor smiled indulgently.

"No, no," he said. "I was referring to an earlier stage of my career."

"Fifty years ago, sir. Precisely," O'Hagan commented.

The chairman, after several attempts to evade the desire he felt, yawned brazenly. Two lawyers facing him followed suit. That passed it back to the deaf assessor, who yawned also. The room seemed to jibber and mouth with a shadowy attempt at imitation, monstrous and indefinite to consider. The still figure of the girl seated at the back of it seemed more far off than ever, remote, absorbed by twisting veils of fog.

"As a matter of fact, sir," O'Hagan resumed, "I was trying to make you see the position we were in, and with all deference, I do not consider that life-lines affect the issue. . . ."

"I had been on deck for thirty-two hours fighting for our lives." He emphasised this by a swing of his hand. "All our lives, you understand, and I gave very little thought to questions of fatigue until . . . well, until I found I was done. So I say now, that if it had not been for the deckload the *Sphinx* would have been afloat to-day."

The junior magistrate moved in his chair. He seemed puzzled, perhaps oppressed. Somewhere at the back of his mind, in spite of the fog, Molière's phrase stirred in an altered form—"What the devil was this man doing in that galley?"

He leaned back tapping with his fingers on the arm of his chair. A man who could defend himself in this fashion should not be in a vessel of the *Sphinx* class. He was

about to speak, perhaps to suggest this, when the voice of one who sat with him intervened.

"How?" said the bearded assessor, who had dozed. "I don't quite follow you there, captain."

"Well—it broke adrift," the Bottle-filler announced. "It smashed the rails, port and starboard on the foreside of the bridge. It smashed up two of my men and kept me going until I was fit to do no more."

"I understand you signed a paper expressing your satisfaction with the manner in which this cargo was secured?" said the assessor.

"Certainly I signed it."

"Without comment or any sort of protest?"

"Yes."

"Was that wise if you were not satisfied?"

"I was satisfied that the thing was as secure as lashings could make it. I was not satisfied with the cargo itself."

"I gather," said the chairman, leaning forward in his place, "that you do not consider the deckload was excessive?"

"It is difficult to say what is and what is not excessive, sir. I was bound to Hamburg. I could not have brought that cargo into a British port—but I could take it to the Continent without breaking any regulations. If we had had fine weather we should have come in sound; but we had gales—bad gales of the kind you may expect on the Atlantic in winter time."

"Hum," said the chairman, deep in his throat. "And I am to understand you made no protest, captain, of any sort or kind?"

"None officially."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"That I expressed my dissatisfaction to my agents and could do no more. If a British ship is bound to a foreign port the Board of Trade appears to have no jurisdiction. She may carry a deckload which she would not be allowed to carry into a British port. I objected to it as I shall always object. Ships are not intended to carry deckloads, if you want my opinion. What can a man do when great cases of machinery, or casks of tallow break adrift? How can he secure them against the *scend* of a ship in a sea-way? If he lives to tell his experience he is lucky. Half the trouble at sea is caused by carrying deckloads."

The assessor, alert still and burning to retrieve his position, drummed on the table with his pencil.

"The Board of Trade statistics do not bear you out, captain," he remarked with pursed lips.

"The Board of Trade authorise deckloads, sir, because shipowners demand it," said the Bottle-filler with point and emphasis.

"I gather, then," said the chairman, "that you would be prepared to place the onus of this matter on your owners, Captain O'Hagan?"

"I think I have made it plain that . . ."

The lawyer who defended this Bottle-filler plucked at his coat tails, but he refused to sit down.

"I think I have made it quite plain," he reiterated, "that if the deckload had not broken adrift I should have been on deck myself when we made the land . . . as it was I was on my sofa. . . ."

"I cannot defend you, Captain O'Hagan," the lawyer pressed, "unless you are prepared to be guided by me."

"I think," said the chairman, "that Captain O'Hagan is unwise to allow himself to be carried away in this—a—fashion. It can do him no good . . . indeed," he frowningly admonished, "it may do him harm."

"I am on my defence," said O'Hagan. "I must make myself clear."

"You assert," said the assessor who had been caught drowsing, "that the Board of Trade authorises deckloads because shipowners demand it. I do not agree with you. I think the statement should not have been made."

The lawyer who represented the Board of Trade rose and said—

"I should, perhaps, have taken notice of that remark, had I wished unduly to press Captain O'Hagan—as it is, I do not intend to add to his burden."

Again the defence plucked at straws.

"Withdraw it, captain . . . withdraw," whispered the law.

And the Bottle-filler, smarting under a sense of oppression he could not define, answered—

"I had no desire to offend anyone when I made that statement, much less the Board of Trade, but it is true. You see, sir," he addressed the chairman directly, "foreign ships run in competition with our ships, and

foreigners carry deckloads. So we have to do the same, or get wiped off the slate. . . ."

"Wiped off the slate! Really, captain, I think you are making a mistake there. Competition is a healthy state of affairs—a—generally. Without competition we should degenerate into something too supine for words. Competition keeps us keen. It invigorates the masses—a—gives a chance to new men, vivifies their brains, clarifies their—a—vision and enables them—a—to compete with other—a—men. You take me? You see the drift? But I should *not* pursue that line of argument, captain, if I were you. It really isn't worthy your consideration, because, you see, it has been considered, thrashed out in the schools, hammered into shape and set forth in the form of—a—of essays."

The chair was away on one of its pet theories and the question at issue stayed.

The lawyers looked bored. The grey-bearded assessor closed his eyes, his brother assessor stared at the brown window he faced. He yawned openly.

"I believe in freedom of exchange," said the chair, "and to obtain that you must have competition. The principle of the thing was set forth long ago by the genius of—a—Bas . . . Bastiat," he covered his face to hide the yawn provoked by this name. "I doubt," he resumed frowning, "if you have ever heard of him, or of Cobden and those of his school whom he—a—so wonderfully paraphrased." He glanced over the gold pince-nez he had assumed waiting for the captain's reply, and that tried man gave it in the language he knew—

"If he went to sea, sir, and had any knowledge of deck-cargoes, I'll bet he didn't believe in carrying them until he chucked the sea and became a shipowner."

The chairman looked solemnly over folded hands at this Bottle-filler and said, in the phrasing for which he was famed since that day when he had received knighthood at the hands of his party—

"I hoped to do you a service, captain"—his intonation was sepulchral—"and to persuade you, if possible—a—to consider this matter from the—a—point of view of the man in the street; but"—he moved his hands and the diamond gleamed—"it seems useless . . . quite useless."

He stared at the row of sorrowing lawyers who confronted him, singled one out and said acidly—

" You were saying, Mr. Bashelan, something of calling certain members of the crew . . . when—a—this interlude occurred. Will you go on ? Captain, perhaps you will be good enough to sit down ? "

The Bottle-filler, with the air of one tired of protest, sat as desired. The lawyer in a matter-of-fact way got on his feet and began to speak. Out of the first sentences there fell a word which made O'Hagan burn. Intemperance ! The last resort of a hard-pressed defence. The article one can produce, at a price, with the precision of all machine-made things, be they lies or merely evidence. O'Hagan leaned towards his adviser with a touch which showed the strain he endured, and received his answer.

" Keep cool, captain . . . keep cool. They generally bring it forward—in cases of this sort," he added after a small pause.

" It's a lie ! "

" Of course."

" Then why in Heaven's name ! "

" Wait . . . we'll scotch them."

Bashelan completed his introductory remarks, then turned and jerked his head in the direction of the group of witnesses. A Belgian who spoke sufficient English to pass the test on sailing day, but at no other time under the sun, crowded to the front and with the aid of an interpreter was sworn. In the hands of the owners' lawyer it appeared from this person's evidence that Captain O'Hagan was constantly drunk. So, too, were the first mate and the chief engineer. " On the night of the wreck," said the lips of the translator with due unction, " the captain was so drunk that he could not stand ! "

O'Hagan was already on his feet when a cry arose from that blank wall space which held one lonely figure upon its dim expanse.

" Oh ! It's not true . . . it's not true . . . it couldn't be true, because . . . because——"

" Lucy ! For God's sake. . . ."

O'Hagan pushed back his chair with a haste which sent a scroop through the high room and in one instant he was at her side.

" For God's sake, Mem-sahib ! " he reiterated, speaking low, holding her hands, staring into her face, " don't let them think you can feel. It's a lie. I can prove it.

Stand firm, oh, dearest, and see me jump on them." He squeezed hands as she looked up, checking the sob which had risen. "Now I must go back," he whispered. "Laugh at the beasts . . . they *can't* hurt *us!*"

He returned to a place beside his lawyer as the chairman opened his mouth to give utterance to that well-worn sentence which threatens to clear the court "if this unseemly conduct is resumed."

A dim threat given in a dim light against a dim personage who might or might not hear it; given and pushed aside both by the court and by the offender, because it was obvious—obvious that a dim smudge amidst the wall space could work no harm.

O'Hagan's lawyer was on his feet to turn the tide. He took no notice of his client's dash or of his return. He was immersed in the study of a Belgian sailor who had provided a sensation which might perhaps focus people's attention on this case of subornation, if on no other phase of the trial. The papers might help here. He glanced round—but with the exception of a young journalist who "did pars" for the shipowners' organ, no representatives of the Press had faced the dullness.

With a touch of anger, the first that had appeared, the lawyer Hargreaves turned to cross-examine his witness. He explained that this sailor had been roughly handled by Captain O'Hagan on the night in question because he insisted on climbing into a boat when ordered to prepare her. He showed in point of fact that the Belgian had been drilled by experts in the art of finding evidence, and that he was an individual who did not understand the duties for which he had shipped. He sent him back with a skirl of indignation and O'Hagan breathed hard.

Then came two additional witnesses, members of the crew whom O'Hagan had saved, who spoke with monkey-like definition to certain acts of drunkenness. They swore it, one through an interpreter, the other in genuine cockney, and again Hargreaves was set to it to prove malice, to prove indeed that this thing had never occurred. To prove, you will understand, a negative—which is impossible, if not, as Euclid would say, absurd.

The Bench listened in bored silence. There was no occasion here for assessors to be on the alert. This part of the thing was to be judged, yea or nay, on the view the court took of a witness's veracity. Doubtless Captain O'Hagan

would be prepared to produce individuals who could swear with precision—meanwhile wise men marked time.

Then from the owners came evidence of a more subtle character. It appeared that they had for some time been doubtful of Captain O'Hagan's competence, and had written to their agents in New York, and other places at which the *Sphinx* had touched, raising this same question of insobriety. True, each of the agencies replied that it had not observed anything to lead it to suspect that Captain O'Hagan drank more than was good for him ; but the suggestion remained a very damning one until O'Hagan's advocate, now thoroughly on his mettle, tore it to shreds. He pointed out with considerable fire that it was not until after a dispute had occurred between this Bottle-filler and his owners that his owners became afflicted with any qualms as to his insobriety—a thrust this which set O'Hagan smiling and the far-off face against the wall quivering with hope and fear.

Oh ! he was very young, this British shipmaster who filled the bottles of his countrymen, yet he was on trial for his life—nearly as young, indeed, as that sweet-eyed girl-woman who sat in the shadow of the wall thrilling when he thrilled, smiling when he smiled.

The magistrates consulted over this point and then the chairman put questions which elicited that the dispute had reference to certain repairs which were considered essential by the captain and his chief engineer, and unnecessary by the owners.

Hargreaves considered he had scored in this bout and ventured to impress the fact on his client, but it appeared that the chairman frowned on the explanation. He did not like it. It seemed to suggest animus on the part of the owners as *well* as on the part of the crew. No—no. That must not be pressed. Unwise—quite unwise, if I may say so. The deaf assessor seemed to concur. He of the long beard drew pictures of the futility of " a captain bein' at variance with his owners." An unwise policy in truth.

So the thing see-sawed—now finding points for the Bottle-filler ; now for his owners. Each lawyer discovered something pertinent to his client, each witness left the box more or less uncertain what he had sworn, but smudged ; and no soul of all who sat in that fog-bound court could have said authoritatively how the case would go. As a

hazard it was worthy the spin of a coin. It usually is when mud has been flung with intent.

But when the lamps outside browned windows commenced to waver and grow dull, Hargreaves sought an adjournment. He considered, in view of the aspersions which had been showered on his client, that he was justified in asking to be allowed to call evidence as to Captain O'Hagan's character. And to this the court agreed. "We concur," it said in parenthesis; "oh, yes, we very certainly concur."

And wise men applauded their decision if others squirmed. The gloom was a burden. Even the magistrate who had questioned what O'Hagan did in that galley was weary and confused, tired, a little petulant and anxious to be rid of puzzles. His head ached.

That is the usual end of legal arguments in any weather; but on a dull day only the lawyers can do without phenacetin. Perhaps that is the reason why they exist.

O'Hagan went under with the fire of that mutual concurrence, unspoken as it was. Nature fought against him here as on the high seas. Individual forces were in the scales, privilege, convention—the law which alters not. If O'Hagan had been merely intelligent he would have made no stir about deck-loads. He would not have challenged an assessor obviously in need of a nap. He would have encouraged him to sleep. He would have found a pillow for his head. Without noise or fuss he would have made him exceedingly comfortable in his chair, and so earned his blessing.

But O'Hagan was an Irishman and without intelligence. He was ready to fight at any moment. He would never consider the odds. He had no subtleties. He was unaccustomed to consider the end. "Let the end take care of itself" might, with some relevancy, have stood as his motto. The strain of Celtic blood in his veins compelled him to challenge, even on this day of yawning and lassitude, when brazen men were weary and a network, filmy but definitely clogging, had been spun about his path.

O'Hagan's keen eyes flashed when he heard the result of his lawyer's appeal. He was unaware of any toils. Subornation was a factor too remote to touch him. He did not know its name.

The room was sepulchral when at length they filed out

of it; a woman's face the one unsullied of all who had endured the day's fencing.

"They can never prove it, my darling," she whispered as O'Hagan joined her. "No one in the world would believe them if they did."

And this was the opinion of the one member of the public who for three days had been content to listen to the wordiness of the lords of creation.

CHAPTER II

WE CONCUR

THE three days granted by the court fizzled out to the accompaniment of fog and the black drizzle known in towns as rain. Then came a gale to clean the air and make men brisk.

Snow stretched out a hand trying to whiten things and retired to brood in face of the salt men strewed. The broad river bustled seaward, swept by the smoke of the eastern chimneys. Steamers wailed in dismal iteration of the fact that smoke blinded them; ferry boats hustled hither and away crossing the traffic. Tram-cars clanged on gongs as they passed laden with passengers; teams of giant horses crept with straining thews up from the docks, and up and down the pavements hastened those pedestrians whom business had called from their homes. Telegraph boys careened on red bicycles, messengers ran hither and thither, darting amidst the courts and subways of a city. Jangle, clang and hustle. The roar of a giant busy tending the wants, stocking the pantries, filling the cellars of a nation grown clamorous for comfort.

And amidst it all, taking small heed of the snow, the pall of leaden air, the mud and salted slush, darted the newsboys, bare of head—usually, bare of feet and legs—in nearly all cases; unconscious yet of tragedy and shouting shrilly of the tragedy they sold.

O'Hagan waiting in the narrow street for his witnesses came forward and took a paper. Twopence changed hands. The boy spat on the coins and garnered them amidst his rags. He seemed elated at his luck and dashed off, reiterating piercingly his tragic cry—

"Loss of a liner . . . great shippin' disaster . . . boats dashed to pieces . . . loss of a liner. . . ."

O'Hagan opened the sheet and presently discovered far down the page a brief telegram from Corunna stating that the mailship *Atrick* had struck an uncharted rock between Villano and Finisterre and had sunk almost immediately.

" The loss of life," said the final paragraph, " will probably be large. Rescuing steamer reports several boats missing. Details later."

" The *Atrick*," said O'Hagan, as he rejoined Hargreaves. " Good Lord ! one of the Eastern Mail. I knew all the men in her—poor devils ! "

The lawyer caught at the paper and scanned it.

" That is your old service, then ? " he commented. " Good heavens, I hope it will not prevent Captain Worsdale giving us the benefit of his presence."

" No fear of that—if I know him. Besides, this is only just out . . . he can't have heard."

Hargreaves shook his head over this. " It will rush him when he does come," he asserted, ruffled. " What a bother ! Well—we had better get in and face the music." Then as they tramped the passage he halted and, looking O'Hagan in the face, said—" Oh, by the way, I hope the lady, if she comes to-day, will manage to control herself better. That sort of thing is all very well in jury cases, or where there are reporters to pass it on to the papers . . . but here, it doesn't do . . . waste of steam, if I may say so. . . ."

" She will not come again. I have seen to that," said O'Hagan, then with a swift turn—" Good Lord ! you don't mean to suggest that you think it was got up for effect ? "

" My dear captain," the lawyer smiled, " I am here in the character of adviser. Certainly I do not suggest it ; but there are those who will. That is why I spoke—why, in point of fact, I felt it was my duty to warn you."

" I am in a world I don't pretend to understand," O'Hagan threw back, frowning. " Out there "—he indicated the direction of the sea—" it is all clean and straight in comparison with this beastly business of lies and shuffling and innuendo. No one can hold up a finger here by the Lord ! but everybody gets up to see what is hidden behind the finger. You shore-going folk don't give us fair play in your courts. There is too much subtlety suggested. Sailors are not subtle—they are white men. White and straight as a die."

Hargreaves took his arm as they entered. " Don't get on edge," he urged. " Perhaps some day we shall get the court you desire. I admit it is necessary."

" Necessary ! " O'Hagan challenged. " Oh, yes—and for that reason it will not come. We are too busy to be

rational. When we have driven sailors off the sea we shall begin to offer inducements to people who have never heard of the sea to send their boys to man our ships. But the boys won't stay. Mark my words—*they won't stay*," he hissed it out—" unless somebody begins to make it possible for men like me to exist."

They took their places and presently faced the music with the calm of all driven souls.

This sudden announcement of the loss of one of his old ships had stirred O'Hagan more than he was aware. The knowledge that it might prevent Captain Worsdale appearing as he had promised made him dread the rush of that final chorus which would echo about his ears. Men of the British Merchant Service are not given a chance. This mud-slinging business, it appeared, was no new thing; but it was rarely urged in cases where so little evidence was on the side of the slingers. Hargreaves admitted as much. At the same time he stated that it was common where these pettifogging shipowners were on the defence. " One-ship companies like these people of yours have no conscience," he announced. " They are there to make money. How they make it doesn't come within inquiry. What are you doing with them, anyhow? Get out, my friend, while there is time."

Hargreaves, O'Hagan perceived, had no respect for shipowners of a certain rank and status. His life was spent fighting them, and he knew more of their methods than he cared to admit.

Well—and here was the music begun already. Someone was on his feet proclaiming that lie afresh. A cockney accent intoned it. The suave facility with which the words rolled was exasperating. But O'Hagan, now that the orchestra had finished tuning up, sat calm to listen. He leaned forward, elbows on the table, chin on hand, ready to quarrel, ready to give back, with a trowel if necessary, anything flung.

The music was before him. He glanced over the score he faced, noting the gradual move towards *crescendo*, the sorrowful phrasing of the horns, thrust in, as it were, to plead, and came in imagination to the wrath and turbulent maze of a chorus which suddenly sprang out, drowning all protest; which marched triumphant and vibrating to the death—then crept in with small wailing arpeggios which wriggled into silence as the victim lay still.

He saw himself still. Very small and very flattened, prone at the end of a vast plateau where no other soul stirred. The dim air was kept moving by the wings of birds which hovered over him, swooping down, waiting, chattering. It was all very far off, and in the distance gleams of light played. The sea was somewhere near. He could hear its roar, the solemn monotone of surges charging the granite coast which faced them. He saw nothing of this—yet it passed as other phantoms pass when man is at war with faith, when hope no longer stands as a possible adjunct, and lies have driven forth charity.

It shaped in his brain at length as the disaster which had overtaken him. By some it was suggested that he had committed barratry. Cast away his ship! God! how he had fought in that blinding whirr of spray and driven spume. How Barlow had striven—poor little Steel, too, who now was a ghost, perhaps on that plane he had seen, with all his crew of seaboys pulling, straining at the oars to reach land which receded as they rowed. He could see Steel as he stood there in the stern sheets waving a cheery farewell to men who would never encounter his anger again, nor his smile, nor the reek of his too rank pipe. Steel—a ghost! One of the lost rising from the sea with a tangle of hair and seaweed clogging him; the fourteen who were with him clamouring to get back into their boat.

Striven? Of course they had striven. Did any fool-magistrate imagine that men voluntarily put themselves in danger of hell fire for the sake of a fifty pound note, or a hundred, or ten thousand, if any shipowner existed who could pay it? Did he imagine, by the Lord! that a captain who had lives in his keeping, who had a ship in his keeping, was likely to be drunk at a moment when he was brushing sleep from his eyes and struggling to find, in a blackness which roared, what *hit* his ship; why she staggered and thumped and tilted with the seas pouring over her . . .?

Did he imagine anything? Could he imagine—or was he so steeped in the attitudes of the drunk and disorderly he judged, that he must apply the same arguments to men of the sea . . .?

O'Hagan breathed hard. His chin was sunk on his hands, his eyes fixed on an object he did not see; his thoughts, his memory, his vitality coping with scenes far

from the ken of courts, far from the drone of cars and trollies—away in a land he could people or blot out as he desired. Dreamland. The beautiful land we harness and govern at will.

Hargreaves touched his elbow and he looked round.

"That's the worst of you people," said the lawyer. "You are all imagination."

"If I had not an imagination," O'Hagan returned, "I should not have gone to sea. Bow before imagination, my friend—it feeds you."

"At the moment it would pay you better to take note of what is being said."

"Exactly," O'Hagan countered, "but payment is just one of those questions which never enters one's cosmos."

There came a sound of wheels and brakes and O'Hagan was alert and on his feet in a moment.

The owners' lawyer was reeling out a speech and Hargreaves taking notes. O'Hagan bent down and whispered —"That's Worsdale for a dollar. I'll go and meet him."

He crept away on tiptoe and came to the door. He was alert enough now. The advent of Worsdale meant so much to this stern-faced man from the sea—perhaps salvation. If *he* could not save him from the effect of this mud-throwing then no one could. He might give it up, blow out his brains, or go and find a patch and hoe it for a livelihood. Oh! the whole business of sailoring was wiped out as far as he was concerned; wiped off the slate, completed. And he loved the sea.

Besides, there was Lucy to consider . . . that sweet girl whose cry yesterday would, it appeared, be twisted into an appeal.

He came down the passage and encountered Worsdale shaking the snow from his coat.

"Well," questioned the great little man, "What in God's name are *you* here for?"

"I lost my ship, sir—and . . . and they want to prove I was drunk and disorderly."

"Of course. That's the magisterial mind. Were you?" Worsdale's eyes twinkled.

"Faith!" O'Hagan smiled, "I was but a minute out of my pew (bunk) when she struck. There wasn't time to get a drink, let alone get drunk, or God knows I might have been. . . ."

"I know. I read your evidence. You attribute it to

deck cargo and are up against the law. Well—let us get in and ask your man to put me up as soon as possible. I can't stay more than "—he glanced at his watch— " fifteen minutes. If my word is necessary, and I suppose it is or you would not have troubled me, it must be taken quickly."

He came into court and moved briskly to the table. Hargreaves at once assimilated the position, and touching his friend the lawyer, who still argued, rose and addressed the chair. He asked leave to be permitted to call Captain Worsdale, who at great inconvenience had come from Town to speak for Captain O'Hagan. He urged acquiescence on the ground that as the marine superintendent of the Eastern Mail Service it was imperative that Captain Worsdale returned at once.

There was a small buzz of talk on the Bench. " The Eastern Mail Service . . . yes, yes, owners of the *Atrick*, which had taken a short cut to Corunna . . . another case for someone to try . . . Yes, yes, certainly. The court has no desire to keep Captain Worsdale longer than is essential."

Captain Worsdale in a trice was in the box, sworn ; the preliminary questions as to his status answered. Then Hargreaves, leaning slightly on one arm, said—

" You know the defendant ? "

" For about ten years," came back instantly.

" You had him at one time as an officer under you ? "

" Yes—as fifth, fourth and third officer in the *Saladin* of the Eastern Mail Service."

" Have you ever seen him drunk ? "

" Never."

" Hilarious—shall we say ? "

" At no time."

" You have no doubt at all as to his sobriety ? "

" I would stake my life on it, sir."

" And your opinion, Captain Worsdale, on his capacity as a seaman ? "

Worsdale glanced at his watch and said at once—

" I found him always a good and zealous officer. A careful navigator. A man on whom I could rely. It was with considerable reluctance I acquiesced in his desire to change into cargo boats. If he had remained in our service after I became marine superintendent I would have had him in command in twelve months. And now, sir," he

addressed the chair, "if I may claim indulgence I shall be very glad to get back to my cab."

The bench acknowledged the position in fit terms, and Worsdale bustled towards the door, accompanied by O'Hagan.

"I should like to express my gratitude, sir," O'Hagan commenced when they reached the passage, but the great little man would have no thanks.

"You have given me a rush," he said. "I'm getting too old to look on that with indifference. I have a ship on the rocks, too, somewhere between Corunna and Vigo . . . devil of a business, I fear. Well—and what were you doing in the *Sphinx?*"

"Trying to make a bit of money, sir."

"Money? You can't make money out of vessels of that class, unless you own them."

"Yes, but I took some shares in her, sir . . . I thought ——"

"Shares in the *Sphinx* . . . Sharum, Fit & Co.?"

"Yes—why not?"

"Better have taken shares with the Scarlet Woman! Good Lord! and I have just given you a certificate for sanity and sobriety . . . Sharum, Fit & Co.! Man, you'll lose every cent you put in. They run 'One Ship Companies' . . . get out of it and come to see me in town."

He stepped into his cab, ordered the driver to keep his horse on his pins and acknowledged O'Hagan's salute. He glanced sidelong at one of the newly produced taxi-cabs buzzing at the pavement, decided that when "those things" were perfected quiet would be dead, and lay back to watch the heave and fall of the horse's quarters as he sped towards the station.

O'Hagan, with a sense of impending trouble weighing on him, returned to the court.

The case droned on. A parson friend arrived and gave evidence as to O'Hagan's sobriety. He spoke quietly, stating that he had known the defendant from childhood and that his conduct had always been irreproachable. Pressed by the owner's lawyer he admitted that he knew nothing of his life at sea; but of his life on shore he could speak with absolute certitude.

And at the luncheon hour the talk fizzled out. The court gave those whom it concerned to understand that it must take time for consideration. There were many

points on which it would be necessary to read over the evidence and confer with the assessors. Judgment would be delivered on Monday next at ten o'clock in the Jake Hall.

Three days' suspense given in the magisterial manner as to a delinquent "caught in the act"; but no cells, no police supervision, freedom, absolute freedom to O'Hagan and Barlow to go where they would, drown thought as they would, or get into the river. Three days of wintry weather in a town which Lucy O'Hagan desired never to see again. A gale whistling over the North Sea laden with hail and rain and black darkness; each morning bringing its quota of disaster—here a commonplace collision, there a foundering. Then on Sunday night with the gale at its height screaming through leaden streets, rockets came from the sea and presently the cliffs were lined by those who could stand there.

A big ship was in trouble—that was all. Why she was in trouble——a thing for surmise among landsmen, certitude among sailors. The Jake Hall with an odd magistrate or two and a pair of assessors would be ready, when the hour struck, to advise men what was the cause, why it operated, and in beautifully balanced phrasing to admonish those men of the sea who were saved what they should have done.

In the interim the ship, in full sight of those watching clusters of wind-driven citizens, gave up the business of trying to get anywhere, rolled over and sent messages no longer either by flag or gun. Far off shiverings appeared. A whiter blotch amidst the spume of that iron coast. All quiet. All tucked away, pushed out of sight by creaming seas. No cries, no wailings—nothing in any sense unpleasantly realistic in the methods of the tucker.

Seen from the cliffs it appeared as though Nature were in league with Jake Hall to smother all those stupid sailor folk with whom she came in contact. The sea itched to be rid of its burden of ships. It awaited only the opportunity and instantly moved when opportunity struck.

It seemed that there was nothing further to be said on the matter. The men who had manned this ship had failed to keep her upright. That was most stupid. In the language they spoke she had "turned turtle"—well, but they had conspired to make her "turn turtle." First, it seems, they had taken her to sea in very bad weather,

with a few locomotives and things for a deckload. Then when the sea became irritable they failed to keep the machinery in place. That was grossly stupid. Then, for no very plain reason they had allowed the ship to become unmanageable, had even failed to keep water out of hatchways which the seas and locomotives had torn open.

Could anything be more stupid ?

If you allow water to pour into the holds you may expect to go down the cellar. The cellar is there always. It is no use pretending you did not know it was there.

And very naturally, seeing that men are unable yet to breathe water, as the ship rolled over her crew was drowned.

That, in effect, was very nearly the opinion of those magistrates and assessors who sat on Monday morning at Jake Hall to pronounce sentence on Denis O'Hagan and Lucy O'Hagan and any baby O'Hagan which might be stupid enough to get itself born—only they said it in better phrasing; the sleek, cock-sure phrasing of all departmental papers, as those may read who desire—

(No. 0000.)

"*SPHINX*" (*S.S.*)

THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at Jake Hall on the 15th, 16th, 17th and 21st days of January, 1908, before Sir Carl Froester, Knight, F.R.G.S., and William Jones, M.A., F.R.G.S., Esquire, two of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace, for the City and County of Northerton, assisted by Captain O. K. Barness and Captain James Arthur Thomas (Nautical Assessors), into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship *Sphinx*, of Northerton, with fifteen members of her crew, on Pradanack Point, Cornwall, on the night of September the 15th, 1907.

Report of Court.

The Court having carefully inquired into all the circumstances attending the above-mentioned Shipping Casualty, finds, for reasons stated in the Annex hereto, that the *Sphinx* went ashore on Pradanack Point, during a S.W. gale of considerable force, on the night of September the 15th, 1907.

The Court is of opinion that the *Sphinx* was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care. There was no proper and efficient use of the lead. At the time of the wreck it appears that the ship was in charge of the Mate, and that the Master was in his room.

The Court is of opinion that considering the state of the weather it would have been wiser if the Master had remained on deck,

especially when it is remembered that no very reliable observations had been taken in order to fix the ship's position before making the land.

The Court is of opinion that the Master failed to exercise that wise discretion which experience has taught it to expect of British Shipmasters, and with great reluctance has come to the conclusion that it is necessary to mark its sense of his failure. The Master's Certificate is therefore suspended for a period of six calendar months.

The Court is of opinion that the Mate acted unwisely in continuing to steer the course set by the Master without at any time attempting to verify his position by the use of the lead. In view of these facts the Court finds that the Mate committed a very serious error of judgment in not calling the Master, in not hauling off the coast, or heaving to until it became possible to ascertain the exact position of the ship. In these circumstances the Court has no option but very reluctantly to suspend the Mate's certificate for a period of nine calendar months.

The Court finds that the *Sphinx* was in good and seaworthy condition when leaving New York. She was well and efficiently equipped and laden in accordance with the Regulations.

Dated this 25th day of January, 1908,

CARL FROESTER, WILLIAM JONES } *Judges.*

We concur in the above Report,

O. K. BARNESS, JAMES ARTHUR THOMAS } *Assessors.*

The annex to this report was set forth in many pages of closely typed matter. In it the court explained the reasons which guided it, tore to shreds the captain's allegations concerning the deckload, ruled out of court the suggestions of barratry, expressed the opinion that it was unwise to over-insure seeing how open such a course was to misconception, then with a scuffle of importance decided that the question of insobriety should never have been made on the evidence adduced; but, with a back hander, pointed to the fact that Captain O'Hagan had called no witnesses from the crew of the ship.

And when these matters had been made plain in Jake Hall, O'Hagan rose and, standing to confront these business men with their satellite advisers, said—

"I protest against your sentence. It is unjust and unwise. If any appeal is possible in a case of this kind, I give notice that I shall appeal."

The chairman, frowning on this stupidity, advised Captain O'Hagan to consult his lawyer and not waste the time of the court.

Even a Bottle-filler should have known what answer would be his.

O'Hagan moved away to consider this view, and with him went Hargreaves and grey-haired Jimmy Barlow —all manifestly sobered by this sentence which is no sentence.

A squall broke over the town as they stood together to discuss it and they crowded back for shelter. Hail, sleet and a blinding gale drove through the street; the townsmen disappeared swiftly to await a lull; but out there, farther east, groups of men struggled to disentangle from casks and cases and spars, the bodies of sailormen who, having no alleyways or passages for escape, must needs stand and take what Nature provides of chastisement.

CHAPTER III

LUCY

O'HAGAN was not on the cliffs watching dead sailors fished out of the surf on that day of days; he was marching streets where the traffic was densest, contemplating this blow which had fallen upon him. It meant not only suspension, but the patent fact that he had been found guilty of negligence. As a corollary, of course, there lay at his door the death by drowning of Little Steel and the fourteen he was attempting to save.

That should have weighed heavily on O'Hagan, but it did not—and for the very valid reason that he understood why the *Sphinx* had become a wreck and the court did not. The phase that troubled him was that personal note which arrives in cases of unjust punishment. Who, for instance, would believe that he was any other thing than a fool? Who would credit, in the face of that sentence, that the fault lay on other shoulders than his? Does not the world always wag tongue over the poor devil who has gone down before its courts? Was it concerned with the blazoned stupidity of magistrates when sitting with assessors to judge sailors? Has it any thought at all for the men who, when presently it is engaged in war, will be there, sword drawn to defend it? Was it not comfortable and snug and blind; busy squabbling over the right to strike, the right to free food and the right to make some other body pay for it?

The clamour of a world too busy to be just stood over this man, pushing him to earth.

The devil of it all was that O'Hagan did not know what he faced. He was concerned with his own humiliation, the wreckage of that scheme for personal success and advancement which he had mapped out. Before he met Lucy he had not been very much stirred by ambition. He was in comfortable quarters. He had a sufficiency. He met decent people, and the work, if monotonous, was not exasperating; but with the advent of Lucy Faulkner all

that was changed. He became anxious to provide her with pretty things. He desired success that she might honour him, and above all that he might give the lie to that old croaker, Colonel Faulkner, who, it seemed, had ventured to disparage him. And now this judgment which had been passed upon him would give the man a handle ; perhaps the very handle he required.

He turned abruptly from the great shops of a main street and sought seclusion in the dingier quarter. He was raw and whipped and angry. The whippers were people who had no right to wield whips. They knew nothing, nothing, as God stands over us, of the conditions which make for wrecks and collisions and disaster at sea. Then what right had they with the whips ? Why had they singled out him, and that unfortunate mate of his, for punishment ?

He came suddenly to a standstill over a question which appeared as he marched—suppose these magistrate fools were in league with shipowners—with his owners. They were all men of the same kidney. Swollen in pocket and swollen of head. " Shore-going sharks." People who had a " natural down on sailors," people of the same type as the flunkeys and underlings who seize upon a ship as soon as she comes alongside, by Jove ! and hang to her skirts until she moves away again.

He walked on because men and boys stared. He walked on because he must do something and did not know what. Because he could not go home yet, could not face the streets where he was known while it remained light. Because he would rather not face Lucy, with his news, until the dusk had come.

An older man would have been stunned by the sentence meted out by these magistrates of Jake Hall. He would have known just how hard he had been hit by it. He would have acquired, in a life singularly proficient in snubs, the knowledge that if a man is suspended in the mercantile marine he may as well end matters speedily. The shock of that sentence might have sent him home reeling or it might have found him at the beginning of a gentle slide into oblivion ; at the top of a pleasant hill at the bottom of which cadgers stand fully revealed, shameless.

O'Hagan entered a shop where they catered for those who desire lunch and sat behind the paper he had purchased, turning pages to seek evidence that his name was

on the tongues of all. A small paragraph at the bottom of a page reciting the judgment should have advised him how little it mattered; but it added fuel to the already blazing fire. He could not eat. He sat there toying with food, his thoughts busy piecing together this fact and that fact; going over the evidence which had been produced for his undoing, angry, humiliated, ready to quarrel with his shadow.

That is where a man young as O'Hagan feels his hurts. His pride is touched. Later, when he has recovered from repeated blows he discovers that pride is a mistake; that pride, when a man happens to belong to the merchant service, is a quality best carried in his pocket.

O'Hagan was sensitive—that, too, was a mistake for a man who aspired to make money by commanding a tramp. He required the hide of a walrus and Nature had dealt him a skin which could flush. He had come from a fine Service into the service of the small, and he had not yet learned the whole gamut of his descent. It was like resigning from the managership of the Bank of England and taking the managership of a small provincial branch of a joint stock bank.

And he had not yet learned the difference.

He came away from the restaurant because he could not well remain there longer. He came out and found that the January light was already failing. The tired sun was on its way to bed through a glow of crimson and blue. Behind him the river ran grey on its way to the sea. Once that picture had reminded him of his home in the south where for the past ten months he had been able to call himself a householder; but with the exception of one or two aspects, common to most seaports, there was little resemblance between the two towns. This north-land city was sturdy as are the western dalesmen. It stood regally above its river. It was busy, intent on money-making and very competent to hold its own.

Ships were being built across there on the northern shore for the service of England. Ships of war, giant and pigmy, ships intended to carry food for the nation, ships intended to fight the nation's battles.

The clang of steel and iron rang out as O'Hagan moved up the slope. The grey streets echoed with the noise of blows. Steam came out in sudden jets which hissed far up amidst the houses. There followed interminably the

jar of shunting, little staccato whistles, the puff of engines in a great hurry to start hauling.

O'Hagan scarcely heard these sounds. They were as far off as the noise of rockets, the wind swirl by the cliffs and the roll of the surf out there where the sea strove. He walked with less elasticity than was usual. He seemed uncertain, perhaps of his way—yet during the weeks he had stayed here, he had learned to know each step ; each trick and turn of the roofs, precisely as he knew the landmarks which led to his home at Riverton. He was tired—and he was dazed.

Lucy awaited his coming, otherwise the streets would not have held him. Her presence up there drew him on. It also made his progress slow.

Occasionally she came to meet him, but to-day he was alone. He was glad for the first time. The hour was boisterously intent on proving that the gale was not dead ; that the night would hear its voice even as the day. It would press screaming at the windows, shaking the sashes, compelling the smoke to stay where it was born. Oh ! a fit day and a fit hour for that slow recognition of the blow which had brought him suddenly from the clouds, made him think, set a puzzled frown upon a brow usually cheery as the stars.

Two hours, three, four hours ago, he knew not what space of time had elapsed, his trial came to an end in the breezy atmosphere of Jake Hall, where crowds waited the Monday's toll of the streets. The sleek magistrate pronounced sentence and passed on to deal with the drunk and disorderly.

O'Hagan insisted on that word. It was, in spite of departmental definition, in spite of the report it issued, a Trial and Sentence of absolute humiliation to O'Hagan. You could see it in his downcast eyes, in the way he looked at people who passed, as though he carried the certificate of stupidity, the credentials of negligence and ignorance, of attempted barratry on his person and anyone could read them. Tradesmen standing in the doors of their shops received no recognition of their habitual courtesy. The captain moved on as though he would have avoided anything in the form of salutation. " Perhaps his Trial " —they, too, spoke of it in police court phrasing—" was over." An evening paper must be purchased to establish this.

You may call this a tragedy or a farce, as you will; but to those who have endured it, it is a Trial and nothing less.

Hypercritical? Not at all. The end may see a man triumphant or prostrate; but he has come through courts which tackle the drunk and disorderly. It may be the making of him, or it may be the death of him—morally, professionally, physically. You cannot grasp its results from newspaper comment—you must have endured it to understand quite how devilish are the blows it may deal.

And here, climbing through the gale-swept streets, came O'Hagan at last, hands in the pockets of his coat, his collar turned up, his lips very straight. He had decided, you see, and Lucy had agreed, that there could be no aftermath of sorrow, no pushing home of the indignity he must suffer. All the sorrow, for Lucy, had been crammed into that night when O'Hagan's ship had gone to pieces in Mount's Bay; all the dread into the few succeeding days.

Until that hint had fallen at the trial, of insobriety, no real anxiety disturbed the girl. She understood that there must be an Inquiry, and commonsense told her it would be unpleasant for her husband—but there it ended. And now O'Hagan stood before the door of his sitting-room wondering what he must say—how he could tell her his news; stood, without turning the latch.

Lucy heard his step on the stairs. She heard him halt on the landing. The rest was a lightning process in divination. She knew that dear old Den had got it pretty badly. She knew that something had come of that mud-slinging. She knew he was hurt, and in a second the door between them stood open and Lucy's arms were about his neck.

She hummed rather than sang—

"Come in, dear dearest—it's cold and blust'ry in the street. . . ."

He checked her with kisses, whispering—

"Arms down, my Mem-sahib. . . . No, no, right down. You promised . . . and if you don't try to remember I shall have to——"

With her lips she silenced him. Her arms slipped obediently to a safe level while with her fingers she straightened his tie.

There was no one on that shabby landing, no one peeping, no maid, no landlady, nothing more intrusive than

a cracked Toby jug standing on a macramé-work bracket to grin at them.

"I promise again," she answered smiling, radiant despite the setting. "I'll promise anything you ask me because you are you, and I love you; and because I am going to be very good always now . . . until——"

"Poor little woman!" he ventured, holding her close.

"Happy little woman!" she retorted, her head on his shoulder.

They entered their small sitting-room with the air of people without difficulties, from whose lives problems were banished; who had pushed fear, sorrow and all other stupidities, as Lucy called them, into the cupboard with Den's coat and hat.

"And now have tea, dearest," said the voice of Mrs. O'Hagan gaily from the other side of a table. "It's ready, you know. I have the kettle here, the pot here, and your chair and slippers are there." She pointed tragically at a small footstool beside her and O'Hagan slipped down to it and leaned back seeking her eyes.

"Tea first, my husband," she flashed, reading without difficulty a confirmation of the guess she had made on meeting. "It has been a horrider day than ever. I tried to go for a walk . . . but I couldn't stand . . . and when it didn't rain it hailed or 'snawed,' as they say up here, and so I just gave it up and sat watching the fire. . . ."

She filled the teapot and set it on its tray.

"It's curious," she went on as he made no sign, "what pictures you can see in the fire—if you look long enough, and how they always belong to one as it were. . . . I mean," she explained, leaning towards him so that her cheek touched his hair, "in a personal sense. You, for instance, may be reading quite a long story there, but I, who am very near, cannot tell what it is, you see.

"In a way, you know, that is sad"—she spoke with the reasoned accent of thirty, when the sum total of her sins had been accomplished in something less than nineteen years—"but on the other hand, perhaps, one should be glad, because, you know, one would not care to think that everybody could tell what one was reading—if it was very, very secret. . . ."

He looked up. He could not resist that touch, that mother touch, so light, so caressing on his brow. She let her hand remain quite still in his.

"But you have no secrets, sweetheart?" he said with a slight mitigation of the frown.

With a smile on her lips, a caress in her glance, she advised him of his fatuity—

"As though one could help having secrets—hopes, wishes, longings, you know, for the people one loves . . . yes, and perhaps for oneself. You have, haven't you, Den?"

"That sort?" he smiled, in hand at last. "Lord, yes—acres of them."

"All about success, and—and doing things?"

"Yes—even about that."

"And never being beaten, my darling?" she whispered, close, close in his ear.

"Rather."

He choked over the word and she leaned towards him, her head bowed upon his shoulder. He slid one arm about her waist and held her.

"I've got it pretty badly, little woman," he said quietly.

She snuggled closer in his arms.

"As though I couldn't have told you that," she said through sobs, "as though . . . as though anyone w-w-with half a heart and n-n-no eyes at *all* couldn't have told. . . ."

"Please!" he begged, his arm tightening.

"Yes . . . in a minute. Oh! I'm such a little fool—I've been saying it over and over and over—'I won't cry—I won't . . . I won't' . . . and here I am simply howling like a . . . a . . . tabby——" She wrenched free and found a small handkerchief. "I won't cry," she reiterated. "I won't. We'll have tea and I won't be a fool any more."

He captured her hands and held them to his lips. "Better get it over and have done with it," he urged.

"Yes," she answered, her cheek resting against his.

He took a deep breath and said in a voice she scarcely recognised—

"They have suspended me, my darling—and, and Jimmy Barlow, too. . . ."

"Suspended?" she faltered, scarcely the wiser.

"Taken away our tickets, you know; mine for six months, Barlow's for nine."

"Your tickets?" She forced a way to peer into his eyes, her own startled.

"They call them certificates of competency at the Board," he explained, "and as it seems we are incompetent they have taken them away."

"Incompetent—you?" she flamed instantly. "How dare they! How dare they! What do you mean, dear . . . you aren't laughing at me? No, no, I know you are not. Oh! my poor darling, what does it mean? I can't understand very well. I know about the Army and Navy; but not this. I am stupid, I expect—and my head throbs. . . . Tell me what it means."

He rose from the low seat she had prepared for him and took her in his arms, seeking to minimise the blow that had fallen. He kneeled beside her, marking her pallor, trying to inspire hope when hope was dead.

"It means that for six months I mayn't go to sea as captain, little woman, that is all. . . ."

"But—but," she interrupted, "you won't have to go to prison—will you?"

"No, no!" he nearly laughed at this, but the terror in her eyes restrained him. "I am free—free as the air. I may do anything I like but be a captain, for six months, that is all."

The cloud lifted. Lucy looked up sighing.

"I was so frightened," she whispered. "I thought perhaps they would put you in prison."

"No," he assured her, calm in the knowledge that his burden was shared, "we haven't quite reached that stage yet." He might have added that he was not sure how long officers were likely to remain immune in this respect, but he dared indulge in no cynicism with that clinging delicate touch upon his breast. Instead he said with a fine show of indifference—"I shall have to get something else to do, for a while . . . get a berth, you know, and try to earn a bit of money."

She watched him in awe.

"Of course it can be done," he resumed. "There are all sorts of billets to be had for the seeking, and I have my shares, you remember, and the rest of my legacy. Oh! we can peg out all right if only I can manage to pick up a job in the interval. . . . I am pretty fit, and . . ."

"You are my husband, darling."

"Rather a failure, so far, Mem-sahib," he threw back, rueful.

"I won't hear it. . . ."

"True, though. . . ."

"No—it is not true. You were splendid in your wreck . . . the papers said so, and you were splendid in court—I heard that myself. . . ."

"I was snuffed out in court," he ventured, still anxious that she should not build too lightly.

"People don't get snuffed out if they have grit," she answered, the colour again in her cheeks, the firelight accentuating it.

"A man fights," said O'Hagan grimly cognisant of the future. "When he has a wife he fights harder . . . but if he fails . . ."

"He never fails, my husband. He may go under—but if he fights he has not failed."

And that they sealed, as children seal a compact; then Lucy, lingering still in his arms, whispered—

"After all, I believe I am glad, Den."

"Glad ?"

"Well," she explained, the colour slowly mounting, "if you had sailed again you—you could not have been back by the time . . . by April. And—oh! my darling, I don't think I could have let you go just when I should have . . . have wanted you. . . ."

With a swift turn she broke off and hid her face on his shoulder.

CHAPTER IV

YESTERDAY

The trouble for these two was not that they were without resources, but that in a world of leaping expenditure those resources were so slender on the side of what is termed unearned increment.

Their joint income as a matter of fact, apart from any provided by O'Hagan in his capacity as a Bottle-filler, was about seventy-five pounds per annum. Denis, you see, held a few shares in an Argentine railway which brought him in twenty-five pounds yearly, and Lucy had a small jointure from her mother which produced fifty pounds in four quarterly payments.

A revenue this which is scarcely more than pin-money; but a godsend to people suffering under the award of a departmental inquiry. It was not indeed a very safe provision, as times go, whereon to assume the cares and duties of housekeeping; yet they faced them without qualms, very much as Englishmen face even sterner affairs. They could worry through.

Their friends almost without exception were loud in their prophecies of disaster. They said that Lucy must be mad, and her uncle, a shelved veteran of the Army, told her she was a fool.

"If you want to marry anybody, why not take on Peter Witterspoon?" he inquired.

To which Lucy replied that Mr. Witterspoon had not asked her to marry him, and that if he did she would refuse.

"Then," said Colonel Faulkner, "you should sit tight. Better marry a Sub without a stiver beyond his pay, by gad! than a skipper in the merchant service. In either case you'll spend your days packing your kit and following your man—if you want to see him—up and down the seven seas; but a Sub has a position and that is more than one can say for these poor devils in the merchant service."

And of course Lucy very disdainfully replied to the shelved veteran that if she could not be the wife of Denis O'Hagan she would be the wife of no one—which is not quite what she meant to infer. Yet it was sufficiently definite to persuade Colonel Faulkner to withdraw his opposition. Indeed, he went so far as to find a hundred pounds " for fallals " and promised to do his best to keep " that mortgage of hers alive."

Thus between them these two enjoyed " unearned increment " to the tune of seventy-five pounds a year in addition to the unplumbed and uncharted depths of a skipper's pay, and share in the wall-sided tramp now lying rusty and broken amidst the granite outposts of our island.

To be precise O'Hagan's pay at the time of his marriage was two hundred and forty pounds per annum—twenty pounds a month ; but it was given on the understanding that he invested—which made it a horse of another colour —yet Denis O'Hagan took the risk.

A one-sixty-fourth share, then, stood against O'Hagan's name in the books of Messrs. Sharum, Fit & Co., and Mr. Sharum, a large person of the clean-shaven brand, had no difficulty at all in showing that an additional hundred or so could easily accrue on this.

" Take it at the worst, Captain O'Hagan, and it will work out in round figures with your salary at three hundred and forty pounds per annum ; at its best four hundred and fifty or five hundred. And all found," he emphasised this as was his fashion, by rolling it sonorously in his throat. " All found ! That isn't bad for a young man, if I may say so. Better, far, than anything I was able to achieve at your age—what do you say ? "

And here again, in spite of a chorus of disapproval from those who knew, O'Hagan decided to say yes.

Since that jovial day of expectation O'Hagan had flaunted the seas for nearly a year in the gaunt creation known once as the *Sphinx*—and his dividend seemed difficult to obtain.

But the joy of it at the time was a thing to be remembered. Four hundred a year *plus* your unearned increment of seventy-five blessed pounds sterling, was nearly five hundred a year, by Jove ! Five hundred—and it might be nearer six ! Why—as second officer of the sedate and well-groomed *Saladin*, where he first met Lucy

Faulkner, he was barely able to finger fifty. Again, to be precise, although his pay was ten pounds a month, his uniforms and travelling expenses *plus* the essential whisky, tobacco and tips left him less than the sum named.

O'Hagan had never studied these questions before that one memorable trip from Bombay to London when Colonel Faulkner came finally to take his place on the shelf at Bournemouth, at the order of a paternal Government. Colonel Faulkner resented the shelf. He was good for twenty years, by gad! Mrs. Faulkner resented it. What, she asked plaintively, could she do with two maids and a cook when she had been accustomed to a retinue? And Lucy, whose father, Major Faulkner, had gone on his last hill war only twelve months earlier, acknowledged that life in Bournemouth or Boscombe or any other place beginning with a B would scarcely be entrancing with Aunt Mary in command.

You see, it had all come about in the most romantic fashion. Lucy and her father had gone to India in the *Saladin*, and quite by chance, Major Faulkner had come across young O'Hagan, who also was of Army stock. The two men talked in spite of the law which forbids passengers to take cognisance of the fact that there are persons on board termed officers. They found a common kinship, rather distant but wholly glorious, and O'Hagan came in time under the influence of Miss Lucy's battery.

Just how strong was that battery may be gauged when it is made plain that O'Hagan paid a short visit on more than one occasion to Major Faulkner's quarters, and finally, when Colonel and Mrs. Faulkner were disestablished by Government law, and that age limit beyond which a man is understood to be a fool, Peter Witterspoon had taken himself off to Simla. Lucy "rather liked" him—that is all. Her aunt pressed his attractions, not forgetting his purse, which rumour said was flooded; but Lucy determined to escape, choosing once more the *Saladin* as a means of exit from the land of rains and plains and dak-bungalows.

So far, you perceive, without a thought of consequences; so far at all events without evident intent. A kinship, distant, glorious, and on the spindle side; a recollection of Dad's outspoken praise—and Lucy, before Aden was reached, had managed to let O'Hagan know that she had not forgotten.

People often sleep on deck during the hot passage to Ras Aluleh, the cape of the wind's death, and afterwards for a while there is no sleeping below—and overhead, perhaps, there marches an officer on watch, a man to whom one may not speak at any time.

People go ashore, though, in Aden, Suez, Port Said. The coal dust is an excuse quite valid even when dust of another quality is in the air. People meet in the bazaars, or on the sands by the edge of the desert. People talk. They wander far. The evening comes swiftly and it is essential to help people back through streets where one must not blunder nor allow tout-people to approach too near—and it is easy to remember, easier, far easier than ever it will be to forget.

The colour is so vivid; the witchery of that brilliant, star-strung sky so impressive; the songs escaping half closed doors so alluring—and on every hand the lithe grace of dusky figures which glide, arms jangling, ankles jangling, a shimmer and a hint of gauze their dress. And the scent comes up from the desert, the eastern dreamland beneath whose calm veil lie devilry and bottomless sin. Hooded men, half veiled women pass and repass, the clang of the bazaar goes on, the chant and thrum of tom-toms never to be forgotten, never to be forgotten by those who have supped with the East.

Here on the sands below Suez with the mountains of Sinai blue in the distance, and the hill country about Jebel Zafarana which blushes with each dawn and lies veiled by day in shimmering waves of heat; near where the palms end; where the promenade fades into a track and only the shadows of Arab huts stand against the skyline, Denis O'Hagan took Lucy in his arms and, for the first time, kissed her.

That was a wonderful moment to Lucy. The thrill of it held her still. The violet mystery of an Eastern night had been theirs and was hers for all time. The waters of the gulf came nearly to their feet as they stood to take that kiss; the lights of the *Saladin* were dimmed by distance; the sigh of palm and tamarisk moved towards them on the wings of a breeze which whispered. They were alone and God was their Father. The cry of the sons of the desert rose to proclaim it—La ilaha . . . illa 'llah illa 'llah!

A dream so splendid, ending in a reality so vivid, does not fade soon from the memory of a man; how much less

it is likely to fade from the memory of a girl, the history of woman's love shows. For Lucy was a girl in years; but a girl endowed with so fine an imagination that it seemed that the heavens had opened and that choirs of angels sang pæans of joy over her betrothal there amidst the sands.

The hot, clean sands which beginning here stretch on and on in undulating waves, like a sea held fast in a mould, until the Atlantic rolls to meet them nearly three thousand miles from Suez.

Thereafter the desert held as great a charm for Lucy as the sea which is its sister. It held the beginning of her life as the sea, perhaps, was to hold the end. And it had the same characteristics. As the sea holds islands in its keeping, white rimmed, green to the lapping waves; so the desert holds oases, little clusters of palms, a few huts amidst the rolling dunes. As the sea carries ships on its bosom, so the desert carries the tawny, fleet-footed Bisharin, and the long-strung line of a caravan. As the sea broods over the enemies which it has slain, so the desert buries or leaves to the glare of its pitiless sun the men it has vanquished—and their voices remain in each sphere.

The voice of the wilderness is but the cumulative cry of those who have succumbed to its force. It has myriad tones. It can play on any heart. It is the voice of those who have lived and fought and died. It is the whispering spirit which touches us and is not. Which comes upon us in the midst of a great peace and fills us with a dread too great for speech; which beckons to us across the gulf which presently will swallow us.

It is the voice which cries out in warning, which laughs and cajoles, and makes mock of men's anguish; even as the sea laughs, having mastered him and blotted him out.

CHAPTER V

AND GOD HAD MADE THEM ONE

The O'Hagans were at home again. The stuffy lodging-house rooms had given place to a palace facing south, high up on the slope of Windle Hill, with adjoining palaces or villas—it depends largely on your outlook how you label them—in pairs all down the road.

This road was called Glenview ; but it bordered a rolling and nearly flat tableland overlooking other houses or villas or palaces on the opposite side of the way. There was nothing glen-like anywhere within the limit of that horizon. Far off, on the right, were chimneys—tall, thin shafts which pierced the sky ; on the left was the hill of Riverton where once a mill had swung arms grinding corn for the townspeople ; to the north was the river and a maze of roofs.

The O'Hagan's palace was called Chatsworth when they took it ; but Lucy, with memories of India in her brain, suggested The Deodars, and The Deodars it became to the surprise of neighbours whose palaces were correctly styled, apparently from the latest list of the " Country Homes of England." York Cottage was among them. Its name flourished on a marble tablet beside a little iron gate. It might have been the sign of a " monumental mason," but was the " residence " of a pilot.

To tell the truth the houses had nothing of the palace about them but their names. They were simple expositions of the jerry-builders' art of fudge. The roofs were ruled in lines of blue and red, the eaves were furnished with a lace edging ; the windows were supported on either side by moulded pillars. Stars and diamonds in shiny brick suggested the various floor levels. The walls were of alternating blue and red bricks, and a staring pavement of tessellated squares and angles led from the little iron gate to each front door.

The sense of some of those who lived in this row of " semi-detached dwellings " was exhibited by those who had striven with ampelopsis to hide their ugliness from

the sun. The sense of others by the addition of variegated window boxes, plaster vases, and in one instance a bevy of terra-cotta statues disporting at the corners of a grass plot, guarded by a pair of terra-cotta lions, diminutive, sad of mien.

Of course it is impossible to obtain exactly what you desire when you are prepared to pay merely thirty-eight pounds annually as rent in addition to rates and taxes; so Lucy O'Hagan had contrived to tone the exuberant fancy of the builders by subduing the colour within, and Denis had completed it in a fashion more eloquent of mankind.

He had arrived home after his first voyage hale and jubilant and when Lucy presently sat down in a chair alone, Denis discovered that the left side of her face was painted green and the side nearest him yellow. There was a patch of red, too, farther over upon the right shoulder of the chair nearest her ear. Denis recognised that this colour scheme was inappropriate to cheeks and hair so beautiful as Lucy's. Then he found that it came from a fanlight which the builders had inserted above the window, and on consideration determined that it suggested "the charnel fires of dead and gone tenants." That would not do. It was quite impossible. It was absolutely impossible. . . . And having reached this stage after various examinations he marched to the window, climbed a chair and smashed the glass methodically with a hammer.

Later in the evening it became apparent that it would be necessary to replace the glass. But O'Hagan was jubilant in those days, just home from a voyage of three months, and full of worship for that beautiful girl-wife of his who had awaited his coming. Therefore he took her in his arms and kissed her and told her he wouldn't be gone a minute, and went out to engage a glazier man who came the next day, did as he was told and went away licking his lips.

And now these two were at home again, trying experiments in household economy. It seemed, after the first fortnight, that it would be very difficult to find that billet on shore which had been suggested as a possibility while yet they had been domiciled in the north. Alternatively there was the question of living on "unearned increment"

—which meant, in their case, about thirty shillings a week.

Lucy had no experience of this kind of thing. Nor had Denis. Yet they entered upon it with a joke—as though, indeed, the problem of life had no terrors for them, no rate-collectors, tax-collectors or debts of any sort or kind which could affect the serenity of their heaven.

Now it was a heaven in spite of the inelastic quality of their income. A heaven so alluring that it had been decided Denis must not go away, even if it became possible, before the summer came. In a moment of supreme exaltation Denis decided that he would sink a bit of capital rather than go just when Lucy most required his presence. And when Lucy pertinently asked where the capital was, he reminded her of his share in that defunct old tramp, *Sphinx*, which had cost him about five hundred pounds and soon would be paid over.

Of course there was no questioning that. Lucy would have doubted her own existence as readily as Denis' word. Did he not stand in her sight as the ideal for all time, the one entirely great and splendid man who may or may not exist in reality, but who lives and breathes for the woman in all true marriage? How then could she dream that he was misinformed? The idea never stirred. Nor did the expected payment of capital. Even the interest appeared loath to wander from the coffers of the firm who guarded it.

The two were occupied at this time in searching the columns of various papers for those billets which were going begging for shorefolk. They were busy writing letters of application and furnishing the open sesame references, busy going to town to interview business men who required secretaries, firms who asked for travellers, firms who offered in return for a day spent kicking heels in the mud a tray of Brummagem jewellery, which at a price could be hawked by the applicant.

Oh! it became beautifully plain with time that the majority of those who offered one, two or three pounds a week as an easy "addition to your income," were persons engaged in catching gulls with claptrap; that the secretaryships and junior partnerships were mythical as the verbiage with which an applicant was received was false. These advertisements had their origin in the brain of the person or company running the agency. The situations

did not exist—but, on payment of a certain fee, sometimes large, sometimes small, Denis would be advised from time to time of any vacancy which might occur.

Indeed, it was all admirably slick and glib and vague and evanescent. Money was the desideratum always and at each fresh juncture—money, the ringing, beautiful sovereigns of our Lord the King which came so reluctantly into Denis' keeping and escaped so fast. Sovereigns which he dared not spend because of the long halt which had come to that payment which was due from the owners of the *Sphinx*. Sovereigns which were required for food and rent and rates and taxes by a brave little housewife who presently would be unable to bustle and cook and pat the dust out of carpets and cushions which were spotless.

Time ran creakingly in those days for Denis, it ran creakingly also for Lucy; but when Denis came home tired, ready to own himself beaten, Lucy's arms went round him as he drew her close and nothing of the fear of either escaped.

Had they not each other? Had they not their home? And if the small maid had given notice were there not other small maids somewhere on the horizon, and would it not be quite easy to find one. Youth, you see, was with these two; love which belongs to youth; strength without which either love or youth is vain.

They discussed at this moment, with March nearly upon them, and increasing difficulty for Lucy, the problem of doing without a maid entirely. But Denis would not hear of this. He decided that if a maid was to be found in Riverton she should be engaged at once—then as he was going out Lucy took the lapel of his coat between her fingers, lifted her face and said—

"Oh—Denis . . ." and halted.

He kissed the white face so nearly level with his own and questioned—"Yes, dearest?"

"But I have no money!"

"None?"

"About two pounds, really . . . but, but it's nearly a month to the 25th, you know, and what are we to do until that comes?"

Denis turned out his pocket and counted the coins, Lucy clinging to his arm.

"Fifteen bob in silver," he said, "and——" He produced a sovereign purse, clicked out two and looked up

blank. "I could have sworn there were three," he announced, "if not four."

"Couldn't have been, my darling," Lucy decided, "because you see there's a spring there and they couldn't *jump* out."

Denis replaced the coins and took Lucy's face in his hands. She seemed scared.

"But I thought"—he stooped and kissed her lips—"you had eight pounds on Saturday"—he looked, smiling, into her dark eyes. "Perhaps there's a hole in your pocket—or you haven't got it all out . . . or there's been a burglar in the house . . . or——"

She met him at once, her fingers again on the lapels, twining, twisting, her eyes alight.

"The rate man came yesterday," she told him, "and he ate an awful lot, Den."

"Went away gorged, eh?"

"Five pounds fourteen shillings and ten D.," said Lucy.

"Monstrous—and you gave it?"

"Had to, dearest, or be carted off to the lock-up or somewhere dismal where they make you pick oakum and break stones for your breakfast—and——"

"No—no—not stones, sweet—not stones," Denis laughed, his arms about her, their cheeks touching.

"Really," she decided. "I asked Mrs. Portland Lodge what happened if you didn't pay rates and she told me. And the man said he had sent us the usual form two months ago, Den, and that since then he had sent us a pink paper, and a yellow paper, drawing our attention to the fact that we had not paid; and that if I didn't pay now he would be compelled to send in the *green paper* . . . and that," said Lucy with a quick pull at the lapel, "means that you would have to go down and pick oakum while they came and sat on our sofa—so I paid, Den . . . that was right, wasn't it?"

He crowed his satisfaction. "Right, little girl? Of course it was right. . . . Faith! and if it were wrong who am I that I may fling stones?"

"You couldn't—at me, Den."

"Oh! couldn't I!"

"I should hold your arm," she decided, her eyes flashing.

"And I should . . . no, I wouldn't—I should kiss you instead."

And this having been decided Lucy questioned in her turn—

"Now tell me what has happened to yours?"

"My what?"

"Money, dearest? You said there ought to be two more."

"So there ought."

"Then where is it?"

Denis shook his head. With one hand he searched his pockets, with the other held Lucy. She made no complaint. He examined his waistcoat pockets, even turned them inside out and found no store of gold lurking to confute him. He patted his outer pockets, considered the question of testing again the accuracy of his count in the sovereign purse, and looked at Lucy.

"I expect you've blewed it, Den," she said without a quiver.

"I expect I have," he admitted, rueful.

"Looking for a billet is an awful expensive thing." Lucy smiled because he looked grave.

"Awful, Loo."

"Just see what you have brought on yourself by marrying me," she whispered, clinging. "No—no, I'm *not* going to put my arms up—I'm not going to make it more difficult for you . . . and, and, Den—we'll *have* to do without a maid when Jane's time is up."

CHAPTER VI

ONE IN A CROWD

Denis left home that morning vowing to expedite matters, and before starting for town sent a message to Hargreaves urging him to press for payment of the long-deferred share. To his measureless optimism it seemed that he had only to express a determination to wait no longer and the thing was done. Yet, when he reached London the answer he found said tersely—

"Inadvisable. Writing," a stupidity signed, he discovered, by Hargreaves.

O'Hagan turned this over as he left the West Strand telegraph office. He could not understand why it was inadvisable to press for payment. He had, you see, merely a bowing acquaintance with business or the methods of those who seek to evade their responsibilities. It was no part of his *credo* to walk mincingly with trust. He would never attempt to "do" a man himself; how, therefore, should he be suspicious? On the whole he was rather inclined to think Hargreaves "a bit of a slacker." It had been the same when hot-foot he promised to appeal against the magistrates' decision—but at that time, O'Hagan remembered he owed Hargreaves a bill of costs for his defence which presently swallowed every penny of reserve he had at the bank.

True, that was paid off, but surely Hargreaves could not have known how nearly "it coiled up" the poor devil who footed the bill! O'Hagan had much to learn. Any business man could have told him that Hargreaves knew his position to a decimal long before he actually undertook his defence. And the upshot of it all was that as O'Hagan now had no bank account, the proceedings for appeal were stayed. In fact, such is the quality of your hot-brained Celt, now that his anger had cooled, O'Hagan had nearly forgotten his threat; but it was likely to spring forth again, as anyone may testify who has attempted to roll a strong man in the mire.

Meanwhile Denis had come to town on another will-o'-the-wisp jaunt, and moved off west to present his credentials. The question of Hargreaves he banished. He walked briskly across Trafalgar Square and came to an office at the foot of the Haymarket which had dared to proffer, by advertisement, a salary of three hundred per annum, "duties nominal."

O'Hagan was very busy planning what he would do with that salary and wondering whether it would be necessary to give up the palace at Riverton and take a flat in town. He rather liked the idea of the flat; but felt rueful at having to give up his garden. He wondered what Lucy would say to it when he told her. It would be rather jolly to be able to go home and say, "Guess what I've got hold of," and watch her while she guessed. She was such a sweet soul at guessing. She never, for instance, when he said, "Guess what I paid for that," suggested sixpence or two shillings, or anything obviously possible, but climbed to the millionaire at once with, "Oh, perhaps a sov.?" and when he said, "Good gracious, my dear child! why, you know . . ." she would break in with, "*Not* two, Den. Oh! you didn't . . ." and he would lead her by by-paths to the dreadful and commonplace actuality.

"But this," said Den, as he turned upon his tracks after consulting a policeman placed on point duty specially to guide him, "this will be something worth keeping secret. Good Lord! if only I can get it! Three hundred and duties nominal!"

A crowd were gathered about the door when he came to it. He rather wondered what was going on and strove to edge his way though. A man wearing a tall hat and heavy coat took exception to this and said—"Don't you poose by me," with the accent of a German.

"But I want to get in there," O'Hagan answered.

"So alzo do I," said the German, "an' zese, an' zese." He nodded left and right indicating the crowd.

"Do you mean to say they are all here as—as applicants?" O'Hagan gasped.

"So," the German nodded, "and we take our durn. He will see us all—everyone, and me he will engage."

"You seem jolly cocksure, anyhow," O'Hagan smiled as they approached by a gradual process that open door.

"Vy not? I speak English"—he shrugged over this—"since I was a boy. I speak alzo German and French

and Spanish. If he require Italian or ozzer language I learn them in one monse from when I begin." He examined O'Hagan's sunburned face and added, "Vot language can you speak?"

"I speak English," said O'Hagan, "and I find most people do the same. Of course," he added, as the German seemed to crow, "I know a bit of French."

"And Latin?" said the German; "alzo Greek, perhaps?"

"I learned them at school," O'Hagan admitted, "and I dare say I could furbish them up if he wants them."

"He vill not," said the German. "He vill require one who speak the language of to-day."

They came into the passage way and passed with a shuffle of feet into a large ante-room, perhaps two hundred applicants for a position which evidently was desirable. The majority were weedy youths, but there was also a considerable proportion of men with grey hair and others who were quite bald—sedate fathers of families perhaps.

They filed slowly to a table at the end of the room where a young man, clean shaven, keen, sat to receive them. There were two doors at the top of this room, and O'Hagan noticed that the stream of applicants parted as they left the table, some going to the right, others to the left. He saw also that the majority passed to the left.

It was a long while before O'Hagan, who was next to the German still, came near enough to hear what was said at the table. Then it became apparent that a weeding out process was going on. Sometimes a keen look sufficed to turn the applicant to the left, sometimes a few questions. O'Hagan heard presently one which made him quake—"Do you speak French and German?" What answer was given he did not hear; but the German, who was in front, seemed to dilate and stand more erect as he turned with the phrase—"What did I tell you?"

And then at length the German approached the table and stood like a soldier at attention. The man at the table looked him up and down and at once said in the language of the Fatherland—"You are German, I see. You speak French also?"

The German answered in the tongue desired.

"English, of course?"

Again came the bowing acknowledgment—"Otherwise I would scarcely have ventured to intrude."

There came a signal which turned him to the right and O'Hagan stood to take his turn. The man at the table searched his face—He leaned back considering, his chin in his hand. Then he said quietly—

"I can see you are English—do you speak either French or German?"

"A very little French—hardly enough to swear by," said O'Hagan. "Latin I was rather fond of at school, and Greek enough to get me into the fifth."

"I see——"

"And I have been about the world a great deal. I know something of most countries outside Europe—America, Australia, India . . . for instance——"

"Public school boy?"

"Winchester."

"That's interesting—but you don't know French or German—hum. My father makes that a condition."

O'Hagan's hopes fell.

"He is rather deaf and you would be required to travel with him, arrange hotels and all that kind of thing—but if you don't know French or German—one would do I expect—I think it is rather hopeless."

Denis nearly at zero said in a fumbling monotone: "Of course the travelling would be child's play to me . . . but, even if I got the chance, there's my wife."

"I am afraid that decides it. No—I am awfully sorry. The advertisement was inexcusably stupid in form. We have given you a journey perhaps——" Then, seeing O'Hagan flush, he added swiftly, "Give me your name and address, will you? I will talk it over and send you word. . . . Winchester rather appeals to me . . . oh, thanks, so much!" O'Hagan had produced and handed his card. "Yes—I could have sworn you were an Irishman—er . . . good-day."

And with that Denis found himself set to the left and presently in the street. A crowd of those who had passed out before him stood about the pavement, others were moving away—a dejected, and for the most part a shuffling group. O'Hagan moved by those who waited, head in air. He felt that he must do something. He would have shouted, but the stolid aspect of the houses saved him that madness. They said to him plainly—"Go home. Go home. Go and read up French—or, go round the corner there and tumble into that school where they will prime

you in an hour, make you a foreign correspondent in a week and a member of the academy in a year—go, and don't fool away your time."

But Denis took to the road at full pace. He marched because he might not shout, marched as though for a wager until when halfway up Regent Street he suddenly remembered that he had not the remotest idea who it was he had seen.

Then again he turned and retraced his steps, came down to Regent Circus at a hand trot, slowed to cross and at the tube exit put on speed once more. His haste seemed to imply that he feared forgetfulness might overtake him, when indeed it was just exaltation, the glimmer grown to a beacon and looming larger with each minute.

The house still stood where he had left it, a crowd still surged about its doors, old men, young men, cripples, straight, tall, short—all types and sizes; men of education, youths of none; men with top hats, youths with Homburgs tilted jauntily; men smoking cigarettes, youths without exception smoking, dangling or holding the cigarette they would presently light, or relight, or suck unlighted.

Oh! the house was beautifully plain and easy to find. Denis could have found it blindfold by the shuffling of feet. He stood and looked upon it. Noted the number afresh. Saw that the ground floors were occupied by people of the name of Brazer, Furley, Hammond & Co., and that beneath the name on each blind was the one word Solicitors.

A grey old house standing back from the road. Nothing pretentious about it. No flaunted trappings. Nothing to attract or to warn or to dazzle; but immensely respectable.

Denis returned to Riverton that night wondering whether he had seen Brazer, or Furley, or Hammond—whether indeed he had seen either. Yet what did it matter? Had he not seen a man who had rather gone out of his way to encourage him, who had promised to write when, with a word, he might have sent him to the right about?

The man had taken to him, as the saying goes. Denis had taken to the man. There were possibilities behind so fine an augury, far-reaching, tremendous possibilities, and Denis was of the nation which springs lightly in pursuit.

Lucy did not understand what had happened, for Denis refused to enlighten her—partly for the pleasure of seeing her smile when he was in a position to announce his success, partly for fear he might be compelled to dash her hopes. To shatter his own was sufficiently terrible; but to shatter Lucy's was the last pain a man would willingly endure.

Lucy sang that night as she had not sung for weeks. Something of Den's exhilaration, subdued as he supposed it was, came into the girl's attitude, into her voice, into the beautiful trust she gave so fully. Den was so strong, so capable, something would happen to help him . . . something had happened. She was sure of it. Victory rang in her soft contralto as she gave him the songs he loved.

He sat beside her turning the leaves. Kisses were her payment. She asked no more. He had nothing else to give.

She took them with a delight which seemed to acknowledge the coming of ease; yet she knew that between them and difficulty stood but a small sum. Less than five pounds. Sufficient provocation here to reduce some women to tears, others to scorn; sufficient to send man or woman to the seclusion of a room, there to end matters for all time.

And Lucy leaned towards her husband singing. She smiled in his face, her fingers running bravely over the keys—

Chatter nonsense, chatter sense,
Kiss my eyes and do not fence,
Take my hand, please,
Pull me near, Tease . . .
I will not plague a man so dense.

Whisper boldly, whisper why
You believe that love can die,
Sit down here, please,
From your own, Tease,
You can scarcely wish to fly?

Chaff me gently, arms entwined,
Let me see how much you mind;
Turn the lights down
Draw my face down . . .
I am yours, and love *is* blind.

Five pounds in the world and that song from her heart! She was a child, even as he was. A pair of them, God knows, facing the valley of shadows without fear.

CHAPTER VII

THREE LETTERS

HARGREAVES allowed no grass to grow under his feet in this matter, but wrote as he had promised, in this strain:

"I received your wire and have noted contents. I do not consider it expedient to press for payment against Sharum, Fit & Co., because it seems likely that such action on your part would compel the firm to suspend payment immediately—when, I need scarcely point out, your claim would not rank as a first charge on the assets. If Messrs. Sharum, Fit & Co. are in a position to satisfy the creditors of the S.S. *Sphinx*, you would no doubt rank *pro rata* with other shareholders in any further payments which may be made; but as the S.S. *Sphinx* was fully mortgaged, I do not think it likely that the shareholders will be able to recover. I should perhaps explain that having taken shares in the S.S. *Sphinx* Co., Ltd., you are able only to claim against that concern. Any proceedings you may feel constrained to take must be directed against Messrs. Sharum, Fit & Co. for their action in selling to you a share in a concern which was fully mortgaged at the time, without, I presume, drawing your attention to the fact that it was so mortgaged. You might, of course, combine with other shareholders in this matter; but in my opinion, and I give it here for what it is worth, I think that unless your object be the exposure of Messrs. Sharum, Fit & Co. *pro bono publico*, you will be well advised to risk no further expenditure."

With all his limitations O'Hagan had no difficulty in comprehending this. The letter was couched in Hargreaves' most impressive style. There was no doubt at all as to his meaning. All that talk of mortgages and creditors and *pro rata* payments when boiled down meant simply that O'Hagan had put his money "on a wrong

'un." In other words, the whole thing was a swindle. A swindle, by Jove ! of the kind no white man would attempt. It came, in effect, to this—in addition to the loss of his ship and his certificate, O'Hagan stood to lose both his capital and the interest which was due upon it. Interest which was required—Lord ! how desperately at this moment.

Lucy was not downstairs. He dared not show her that letter when she came ; he dared not allude to it. He had the doctor's word that she must not be allowed to think ; but if she knew this, then how would it be possible to maintain sunniness ? With the letter locked carefully in his desk Denis O'Hagan sat down to consider his reply.

> " I have no money to spend," he wrote. " If other shareholders make a fuss let me know and I will try to join in—but get me my interest if it is possible to do so in any way. I need hardly tell you that after my heavy expense it is most urgently required."

And having posted this he marched with a set face to plan his day. But a question throbbed which he could not still, a question which touched on the actual position, long hidden but now imperative. " What was to be done ? They had less than five pounds between them and nothing coming in. What was to be done ? "

It was impossible to dull the dread which accompanied that question. It was a new sensation—one born partly of fear, partly of inexperience. In a few days the rent must be paid. In his desk a notice from the Water Company threatening to cut off the supply reminded him that if he paid they would be penniless. What would be done if he failed to comply with demands such as these ? Would they be turned out ? Would they be sold up ? How far was it possible for landlords and water companies and rate collectors to go ? Surely they would not move at such a time as that he faced !

He walked in greater distress than had been his lot hitherto. Action, movement, the pursuit of his calling would have saved him. But this was the one thing debarred by the attitude of authority. If he had been without home ties he would have shipped away " before the stick " as the phrase goes, and put in the interregnum in any capacity rather than kick heels in miserable ineptitude on shore. The broom and the crossing which men

adumbrate when afloat as a means of escape from nearly intolerable conditions are not easily found by those who seek. There are other people in the world. Most of the crossing places are filled by attendant sweepers. Those left for sailor applicants are of the dregs—passages leading to no-man's land; passages on the way to oblivion.

Oh! it was all intensely complicated and wickedly designed to scotch those who are of the nation's best—men of the army and navy; men of the mercantile marine. Without these men the nation could not exist. It would never have come to be a nation—but the officer in either force who has been compelled to order his men to fire on rioters is hauled before a bench of magistrates to defend himself; and the sailor who has lost his ship is laid by the heels on the judgment of the Great Unpaid for "faults" they do not pretend to comprehend.

O'Hagan came back after a while, his mind again busy with the inequalities of reward and of punishment. For weeks this had remained quiescent. He was prepared, seeing he was set desperately to husband his resources, to acquiesce in what reason told him was unfair. But now his resources were like to break in spite of his caution, the fact that he had been sentenced unjustly and turned loose to browse or starve returned with increasing force. He damned the moment he had walked into the office of that tribe of sharks known to him as Sharum, Fit & Co., Ltd. He damned the innocence with which he had succumbed to their flattering and echinated phrases. He damned the law which permits overloading and deck loading; the flabby-faced tribe who administer the law, if it be a law. He damned the "Plaster Saint" who from his place on high nods acquiescence and approval, while dealing out sentences to the men who are compelled to work these ships—sentences which in effect mean starvation.

All the blows a man has received sting and tingle afresh when he is hit covertly from behind the ambush of the law. Because O'Hagan lacked the means to prosecute his cause apparently he must go under. Aye! but would he? A picture of him marching down the tier of palaces with their tin-pot decorations and grandiose names would give the lie to that. A suggestion—yes. But definitely—no. O'Hagan was too mercurial to be easily led to the slaughter

chamber, too vigorous to succumb before this facer, too tenacious, too much in love with that sweet girl who practically fettered him to know that he was fettered, to consider it, to hint at it. And there you have the heart of his character, the soul of him—the undying force which guided and helped him at the very moment that it held him chained.

So he came down the slope beside the palaces and entered his own tiled pathway to his own front door questioning whether Lucy were yet awake. The sight of the open window of her room had driven anathema from his brain. He was calm in spite of the stress he endured, ready to greet his girl with a cheery word, ready to fight for her if only—and this puzzled him—he could see exactly where to begin. No other soul in the world, apparently, trusted him or cared to help him, only Lucy. How then should it be possible to consider defeat? He pushed it from him with both hands as he entered his house.

The small maid who had given notice in orthodox terms stood in the passage to greet him as he closed the door.

"Oh, if you please, sir," she said, "Mrs. Sykes, the lady at Portland Lodge, sent in some letters." She handed them with the phrase, "They were took there by mistake and they are very sorry they weren't sent in last night—but everyone seemed in bed."

Almost without heeding this explanation Denis took the letters and re-entered the dining-room. The first he opened had on the envelope in small black type:

"Brazer, Furley & Hammond,
Solicitors."

and he thanked God Lucy was still in her room. He unfolded with a thrill of apprehension. So much depended upon it—so much.

And this is what he read—

"I am sorry to be compelled to disappoint you; but as I informed you on Tuesday, my father makes one condition with which, I understand, you are unable to comply. French he must have, French and German if possible, as owing to his dependence now on whoever accompanies him, it is essential that one language in addition to English is a qualification.

"I may add, if you will allow me, that if I personally

required help of the kind stated, I should choose you. That may be cold comfort ; yet, in spite of it, if you think I may be able to help you to obtain an appointment in some other direction, I will gladly do what I can for the sake of Winchester, if you will call."

This was signed by Stephen Hammond, and O'Hagan lingered over the name seeking to recall it. But at the moment it escaped and he turned with a sigh to the second letter. This said in the ungrammatical English of one more accustomed to use the hammer than the pen—

" Sir,—A man told me you was on the look-out fer a job and so i take the leberty of writin' to say as i know of one. And if you feel like takin' it on an' pying a far cormision say £10 fer each hundred you get Well wire me to 15, Standish Street E. and i will Meet you an' arrange fer the introduction.

" Yours trulie,

" Bill Thomas,

" Enginer Fiter.

" P.S.—Say where wen you wire."

Denis had read this strange epistle twice and was frowningly considering what he should do when the door opened and Lucy, clad in a loose-fitting, rose-coloured trousseau gown, came into the room.

" Letters ? " she smiled as he rose and shuffled with the envelope containing Stephen Hammond's tantalising epistle.

" One," he said, " which I can make neither top nor tail of. Come and dekko hai, Mem-sahib, and tell me what to do."

He put his arm about her, worries forgotten, her beautiful eyes the lodestar which spoke of hope, even now when hope had seemed to be dead.

" Mem-sahib has silly head this morning," she joked, her cheek against his shoulder ; " read it to her."

" Bad ? " he questioned, facing her, the letter pushed aside.

" Nothing a cup of tea will not cure, oh dearest. Read it, please."

He crossed and rang for breakfast, took her to a chair and, sitting on the arm of it, read what was said.

Lucy looked up as he concluded and asked at once—

"What will you do, Den?"

"Think it's worth while risking five bob on it?" he asked.

Her eyes rather negatived this, but she said—

"I wonder where Standish Street is—do you know?"

"Poplar way, I guess."

"Where you took me when you joined the *Sphinx*, Den, down by East India Dock Road?"

"I expect so—very likely one of the little streets running down to the docks."

"Um!" said Lucy with a frown growing; "it's not *quite* the sort of place I should expect to find a job for my husband in. Oh! I can't think. My head's stupid to-day . . . toss for it."

"'When in doubt play trumps,'" Denis quoted and sought a coin. "If I were flush I shouldn't hesitate. . . ."

"If you were flush, oh dearest, I should not let you go. Go on. Spin for it."

"Right. Heads I go, tails I don't go. Savvy?"

She nodded and he tossed the coin. It fell at her feet, a head of His Majesty King Edward by the grace of God Rex et Imperator, and as Denis stooped to recover it he said—

"Well—that's settled anyway. I shall wire before I go to town. Come and have that cup of tea, dear dearest, and cure your poor head."

And fifteen minutes later he kissed her and started to catch the 9.45 train, the train which a merciful railway company has decreed shall be cheap each day from Riverton.

CHAPTER VIII

THE "BILLET"

THE moan of wind sweeping past the house compelled Lucy to shiver as she lay waiting for Den's return. It had the eerie quality of a personal assault. It never died. It was persistent, increasing, malignant. It kept up a burr of horrid comment which had the effect of spite. It seemed to glory in the attitude Lucy presented to the forces which whelmed her, together with that strong man who was her husband. They were bent—both of them. The wind boomed in the chimney reiterating this fact. It shook the windows in mere devilment. It seemed to insist that it could enter, but chose the more fascinating pastime of scare.

And Lucy lay still listening to it, waiting, waiting as only those do who understand the wind's power. Yet she did not lack courage. The fact that she lay still in that buzzing room may be taken as a signal to her lack of fear.

There was a day when she had raced her pony full pace to try to ride under the rainbow, in order that she might come out on the other side a boy; but that was far off now, far as the hill country which had seen the ride. Now, if she had her way, she would have ridden into the valley of shadows, if by enduring its torture she might have emerged on the farther hillside, well and able to take her part in the fight, her child in her arms. But the valley remained to confront her, even as the wind which sought to terrify her. All day it had boomed. Her head ached with its assault.

She saw difficulty before them and recognised the handicap which her illness must bring. She saw Den shouldering his end of the burden, but looking round found no one at the other. Her place was empty. Den could not carry the whole burden without coming to the centre of it—and that made it too heavy for him to bear. That thought made her more fearful than the wind.

She considered it from every coign. A strange fluttering assailed her. She seemed to struggle for breath; yet she

knew she had not moved. Then mercifully, from afar off came the shriek of an engine, a hiss of steam borne gustily to the hillside, and she recognised that the train which was to bring Denis back from town had started once more on its way.

Presently Denis would be here. Presently she would be able to shake off this lethargy which held her. Presently he would come in, strong in his manhood, and take her in his arms so that she might regain courage.

A clock whirred out ten silver strokes. Someone called "Coo-ee!" from the road, and there followed firm footsteps running on the tiles, yet Lucy did not stir.

"Where away, oh Mem-sahib?" Denis cried as he closed and locked the door.

"Here, dear dearest . . . in the drawing-room!" Lucy trilled from behind lath and plaster walls, and with a shock he recognised that for some reason, in spite of her playful rejoinder, she was not coming to greet him as was her custom.

He looked bronzed and hearty as he entered; his eyes sparkled, his face was whipped red by contact with that breeze which boomed so menacingly in Lucy's ears. He looked strong. She looked fragile — but her eyes brightened as she stretched out hands to greet him. He crossed to her side and sat down in the space she prepared for him. Then he tucked one arm about her and leaned to kiss.

"Not very fit, dearest?" he questioned, looking into her eyes, a scare thrilling him.

She reached up and pulled him near enough to make him understand.

"Dear dearest . . . I fink you'll have to carry me upstairs to-night," she whispered.

He half disengaged himself, more frightened than before.

"Now?" he asked.

"No—no. Presently . . . I had to—to call the doctor this afternoon and he told me to go to bed at once . . . and I didn't—because I wanted you to come first . . . and then I felt better and so I stayed to see you—and now I think I couldn't manage all by myself. Isn't it stupid . . . you aren't cross, are you, Den?"

"Cross!" He leaned over her, his fingers in her luxuriant hair. "Why—did I seem impatient or anything, my Mem-sahib?"

She captured his hand and drew it to her lips.

"No, no, no. You are always kind and gentle and loving"—she choked over the word—"but I'm such a little fool. I—I can't help you . . . and you are so bothered . . . and I do want to be of some use. . . ."

"You are my wife, dear heart," he whispered, trembling. "You are braver than I. . . . You help me every minute of the day."

"Sure?" she faltered, her eyes lifted to his, her face flushed.

He sought her lips and gave the assurance she desired. Her arms went up about his neck and held him. The wind moaned in the chimney. It wrestled with the shrubs just outside their window and passed on singing, triumphant—the force which had helped to bring this man low and now would hold him chained.

With a sigh Lucy released him and, looking steadfastly into his eyes, whispered—"I wish sometimes babies had never been invented, Den . . . don't you?"

"No, dearest," he lied bravely, holding her close.

"Sure?"

"Quite, quite sure."

"Then that's all right . . . but I did think they rather make me no use, you know . . . and, and I can't afford to be no use now, Den. I've got to be a real help to you . . . for better or for worse, it said—and, and this is a bit of the 'worse' part come when you weren't ready. . . . Oh! dear dearest, I do wish it was all over and I could let you go or come with you if the stupid ship people would let me. I would if I could, Den . . . Oh! I would, I would . . . but I . . . I'm frightened to let you go now, if that is what you've come to tell me? It is that—isn't it . . . it is . . . it is. . . ."

He smiled, facing her, playing still with her beautiful hair, while the wind rolled booming without, the victor crooning his thanks, laughing about the eaves and buttresses, sobbing, bubbling and in triumph.

"I could take it," he said, "if I like . . . but I refused."

She snuggled closer in his arms, asking why.

"I should have had to sail in about a fortnight, oh dearest . . . and I couldn't do that, could I?"

For a moment Lucy lay very still, then with a sudden thrill of fear she cried out—"Not unless you could take me with you, Den. Wouldn't they let you? . . . Couldn't

you persuade them? I shouldn't mind if you were with me, you know. We should manage somehow—but not if you had to leave me at home."

"I couldn't do that," he answered at once. "She's a wee bit of a thing with no room for passengers, scarcely enough for the half dozen or so who will have to take her out."

"So small as that!" She had grown suddenly calm with his explanation. She seemed puzzled and added:

"Den, tell me all about it. Is she a ship?"

"A tug-boat, dearest."

"A *tug-boat*, Den?"

"A very small one . . . about five tons. . . ."

"Five tons! How big was the *Sphinx?*"

"About three thousand, dearest."

"And she was a dot to the *Saladin* . . . Oh! I am so glad you decided not to take her. Where were you to go? What could they do with her at sea?"

"I was to take her to South America—Valparaiso as a matter of fact—and I was to get two hundred pounds for the job. . . ."

"Two hundred! Oh, Den—and you had to refuse."

"Yes. But it wouldn't have been all beer and skittles."

Lucy considered this, then asked—

"Why were they going to pay such a lot . . . it is a lot, isn't it?"

"Well—you see, she's rather small and . . . it might take some time to get her out. There's a risk, too, that doesn't come in ordinary voyages——"

"Because she is so small?"

"Mainly that—but also because she is not quite fitted for ocean traffic. She's for the docks or harbour work, you see—and as she has been built here, they have to get her out. . . ."

"And they wanted you to take her?"

"They offered me the billet."

"Had they *offered* it to anyone else, Den?"

"I expect so—very likely."

"I am sure of it," Lucy commented.

He laughed in her face.

"It would be no use trying to bamboozle you, Mem-sahib. You know too much. Of course, it isn't a job for a man with—with anyone dependent upon him. They

didn't know I was married, you see. It is one of the risks that come in the way of poor devils on their beam ends. I am supposed to be more or less desperate and so I got the offer——"

"But how could you go—you are still suspended, Den?"

"Oh, they get over little difficulties of that sort—if they take to the man. She will hoist the Chilean flag and her skipper will sign Chilean articles. A ship can go to sea one way or another pretty much as her owners choose to send her. And this sort of craft is just dodged along from port to port, and when it blows she must get in somewhere. I would have taken it like a shot," he added, with a touch of the fight that was in him, "if there had been no Mem-sahib to worry herself ill over it."

"But would it have been safe, dearest?" she whispered, clinging to him, her inability to help him again stifling her.

"It would have been a fight," he said at once. "And this will be a fight, too, little woman . . . but we'll win out here, and Jimmy Barlow will do his best with the tug-boat."

"Jimmy Barlow!"

"Yes—he jumped at it, poor beggar!"

"Why—is he very stony?"

"He has been working in the docks, oh dearest—humping cases at twenty-eight shillings a week, for I don't know how long. Then it appeared someone objected to him, because he wasn't a trade unionist. And the whole gang threatened to strike if they didn't take him off, so Barlow got a week's pay in lieu of notice and had to quit. Of course he was pretty stony and he was no end thankful to me for giving him the chance to apply."

Then rather suddenly a gust of wind took hold of the window and rattled it so fiercely that Lucy clung to Den's arm trembling.

"Take me up, dear dearest," she whispered. "It's that awful gale when you were in the *Sphinx* that makes me frightened. I never minded before . . . perhaps presently I won't mind it again . . . but it has been—doing—its best to break—me down—all day, Den . . . and I can't bear it. I can't . . . I can't!"

He gathered her in his arms and stood swaying much as a mother does her child, and his strength calmed her. She put out one arm and twined his neck.

" I am such a little fool ! " she whispered, her face tucked close to his shoulder.

" Shure ! " he answered, bending to reach her lips. " You aren't heavy enough for a fool. By the weight I should judge ye for a spirit—a spirit, bedad ! so fine and trim, that naught av fear can enter in."

" Den, I was afraid. I was—I was. . . ."

" But now you're laughin'," he answered, refusing to be serious.

" That's because you are with me, dear dearest. Take me upstairs. I was afraid you would have to go and leave me . . . and I couldn't bear it. . . . So I *was* a little fool, you see. And I'm awfully sorry that Jimmy Barlow will have to take it. It isn't fit. Fancy anyone daring to offer you a ship that can only carry five tons !

" Yes, a bit of a drop, isn't it ? " he laughed, and carried her upstairs.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE GANGWAY

March nearing its end. A grey day screening the grey Thames, the farther Kentish hills diaphanous in their misty trappings.

Thin rain falling, air nearly stagnant, the docks a blur of smoke and steam and slow-driving moisture. On every hand the clang and jar of winches, the hiss of hydraulic cranes, the rattle of trains moving up the dock railway, the crash of buffers, and occasionally the boom of a horn far down where the river rolled sluggishly seaward.

O'Hagan came from the dock-side where one of the eastern mailships lay preparing to face a new voyage. For an hour he had waited about the sheds at the foot of her gangway watching the men who wheeled trucks and tilted cases which were caught and swung inboard by a crane which suffered as with asthma. Sometimes he stared at the grey outlook, sometimes stamped a few paces up and down before the gangway ; but generally he kept out of sight of those men up there on the mailship's deck, who might perhaps have recognised him.

O'Hagan had been marching London streets and London docks for some weeks, and he was beginning to comprehend his position. He had made no attempt to see Captain Worsdale, although once, in a rare burst of optimism, he had gone so far as the company's office in Leadenhall Street, and had retired with equal rapidity. The commissionaire on duty had recognised him. That was all.

But now, driven by the persistent ill-luck, as he termed it, which had attended his various attempts to find employment elsewhere, driven indeed by a sort of desperation which was becoming, in a sense, his *métier*, he had decided to beard the great little man at the docks.

He would feel freer there, he argued. Those grim office fronts always threw him out of gear. They were like

Jake Hall, and the stuffy court house which had seen his trial. They smelled, too, of soft soap and polish. There were too many barriers and screens, and the counters were too wide for sympathetic speech. That commissionaire fellow had a way with him, too, that was exasperating. Rather familiarly pointing to the fact that he remembered O'Hagan as an officer who came up in charge of the specie—not so long ago—and fancied himself a bit of a swell.

Perhaps these notions scarcely redounded to O'Hagan's credit. They seem to suggest a pride which was unwarranted; but they may also suggest that feeling which is much more difficult to define, which arises when a man knows that he has been knocked down for a fault which was no fault in the eyes of his compeers. And now that he had come to the docks, it seemed there were others whom he would rather not face.

A stumbling-block, this question of acquaintanceship for men on the down grade; one which O'Hagan had not thought out. For that reason he marched the dock-side and stared at the grey drizzle which searched the quality of that coat he wore.

A train ran clanking to a halt at the station, and presently a small procession of men came over the bridgeway which spanned the head of the dock, and moved down the slopes to reach the shipping. Five or six passed O'Hagan and climbed the mailship's gangway; but he still waited, eyeing the bridge.

When it seemed certain that no other passengers had arrived by this train, O'Hagan opened his coat and shook the moisture from it. He appeared undecided. He glanced at his watch, again buttoned up, turning the collar high, and with a sudden twist moved off towards the canteen which stood upon the bridgeway.

It was cold, raw, and the steaming rain was of a quality which pierces any coat not waterproofed.

O'Hagan entered the canteen, approached the bar and said in his deep voice—"I'll trouble you for a drop of Irish hot—and a biscuit and cheese."

A goddess of the counter glanced up at him as she prepared the drink and said—"You *are* wet. Miserable outside, isn't it?"

"Miserable inside, too, at present," O'Hagan replied. He patted his coat and a shower fell on the floor.

"If you go on like that," said the goddess tartly, "we'll have to mop the place up when you're gone."

O'Hagan was too much occupied to take heed. The goddess pushed a tumbler across the counter, brought biscuits, cheese and plate and presented them without further talk. She seemed for a moment not to see the shilling O'Hagan tendered; she was glancing up at him as though meditating speech; then his eyes caught hers and in a great hurry she accepted the coin. She pushed four coppers across the counter, passed from his presence and sat down in a little room with other goddesses.

"It's Cap'n O'Hagan," she confided to a friend, who occupied a chair beside her, and stared at the crochet she held. "I didn't think it would run to Irish hot to-day. He's been out of a job nearly six months they say."

"Oh!" said her friend; but she continued busily to make holes in white cotton.

"He was in the papers a lot at the time—remember? I don't think he improves, do you?"

The friend peered for one moment through the small door and returned to her work—"He's got good eyes," she said.

"Oh! his eyes are all right, he's Irish." The goddess tossed her head.

"But he hasn't got a ship?"

"No—*and* won't."

"Why not?"

"'Cause he's on the Black List, ducky."

"What's that?" came without fire from the goddess who worked.

"The List at Lloyd's, of course."

She rose from her chair with a movement of impatience and went out to refresh a group of three who required, on the opposite side of a glass partition, pints of "four-'alf" and countered the coin to pay for it.

They were British workmen from the lower reaches of Riverton, and Denis O'Hagan contributed to the cost of education and maintenance of their children. The tram fares necessary to bring them to and from school without the exertion of walking came also out of Denis O'Hagan's pocket in common with all other ratepayers.

The men consumed their pints to the accompaniment of a blood-spattered jangle of talk, or what passes for talk,

and demanded additional pints. Again one laid the essential price on the counter. The goddess swept it into one hand, dropped it in a machine which rang a bell, tendered the change and served again three " four-'alfs " —whatever that may be.

She returned to her friend and to her subject with the air of one who had missed an opportunity.

" I wouldn't take a penny from him if I could manage it," she confided, " but there—that sort are so bloomin' proud you can't do anything with them."

" Him " obviously referred to Captain O'Hagan. The goddess took up a stocking, inserted her hand, and drew it slowly across a clenched fist.

" What's he down here for ? " her friend questioned, briskly making holes while the other searched for them.

" Dockwallopin', of course."

" What's that ? "

" Why—lookin' for a ship in the docks. My ! haven't you tumbled to that ? "

Her friend sniggered.

" Looks like it, doesn't it ? " Then, after a small silence, " An' why can't he get one ? "

" Be-cause," said the goddess with extreme deliberation as she drew the foot of her stocking round her hand, " he's on the Black List."

" Yes—but how did he get on your 'Black List,' as you call it ? "

" 'Tisn't mine, ducky—it's Lloyd's, and he got on it as usual, be-cause—he—lost—his—ship."

Even this slow enunciation failed to stay curiosity. The girl who had remarked on the quality of O'Hagan's eyes glanced up and said—" Did he try to lose it ? "

This appeared to irritate the goddess. She answered swiftly—

" So you've got hold of it, too ! I don't believe it . . . go an' ask him—with your 'try' ! Does he look like the sort that would try ? " she flamed. " You are green ! " She threw down the stocking and found another.

There came a cry from the bar and she rose to provide matches for the drinkers of " four-'alf."

" They all go on the Black List," she said with the calm of an angry woman on her return, " if they lose their ships. I call it downright murder."

" Seems to me, dear," her friend commented, her head

on one side as she examined the holes she had made, " that you are sweet on him."

" Sweet ! " said the goddess. " I like that. Oh ! I do like that . . . why "—she rose expressionless to face her friend—" he's married."

" Sorry," said the friend, and resumed her work as the goddess on duty went out. " For you," she added when she sat alone within the small room.

O'Hagan finished his whisky, buttoned his coat and passed, unconscious of the interest he had inspired, once more into the drizzle.

And outside the canteen he came suddenly upon the great personage for whom he had waited, got wet and broken his rule.

" That you, O'Hagan ? "

The dapper little man halted for a brief moment, and with a swift glance added—" Want to see me ? "

" Yes—if you can spare a minute, sir."

" Presently. Come on board."

They marched side by side in the direction indicated. Captain Worsdale's lips were firmly set.

CHAPTER X

CAPTAIN WORSDALE

THE marine superintendent of a mailship service is a man of some consequence when he is at the docks or on the fine promenade of one of the vessels which shine at his bidding; but in the city, among magnates who rule the shipping, he stands on a lower pedestal. He is, in point of fact, the go-between who makes palatable unpalatable orders; who conciliates both officers and surveyors; who is benign and bland even when things have gone irrevocably to the devil. He is a man of parts. He wears a top hat and carries an umbrella as regularly as does a Babu.

Captain Worsdale went farther from the sea in the mere matter of attire than do most of his *confrères*, but, then, he was also a shipowner. He wore spats and dangled an eyeglass; but he was smart and kindly—a man who knew quite well that given certain conditions accidents were inevitable. Who acknowledged indeed that to-day most of those conditions are present.

But Worsdale had detected O'Hagan emerging from the door of the canteen and he was not pleased.

"I got your note," he said a little stiffly. "I shall be occupied for some time; but come up and find shelter from the rain."

He led the way at a smart walk down the slope and along the quay. O'Hagan recognising his disadvantage followed at heel. The attitude of the British shipmaster when seeking rehabilitation at the hands of those who rule was already in some degree O'Hagan's. But for the fact that these two men had come together when they did, O'Hagan would in all probability have been at Worsdale's side.

They came to the mailship's gangway, climbed it, and the marine superintendent became immersed in the business which called him daily to the docks. For half an hour O'Hagan cooled his heels on the lee side of a house upon the promenade; then a quartermaster approached and led him to the presence.

Captain Worsdale was seated and at his ease in the commander's room when O'Hagan entered. He looked up and said suavely—

"Sit down"; then added, "it's a beast of a day."

O'Hagan interpreted this as a hint that his friend was less friendly than when he had served under him. He decided to be brief.

"If you don't mind, sir," he answered, "I think I had better stand. I'm rather damp. I need not keep you a minute."

"Nonsense," came irascibly from the stern lips. "Take off your coat and sit."

O'Hagan complied. He had an uncomfortable feeling that in spite of his hope, in spite of Lucy's persuasion, all would not be well with him at this interview. Worsdale's crisp phrase confirmed this as he sat down—

"Yes—it is wet. You look drenched . . . well, what can I do for you?"

"I thought, sir," said O'Hagan with what precision he could summon, "that you might perhaps be able to take me on again. I've had very little luck lately, and I am beginning to need it."

The marine superintendent, not an unkindly man as events have shown, sat nevertheless with pursed lips over this.

"You resigned the service," he said at length, "against my advice."

"I did," O'Hagan admitted.

"You wanted to better yourself, as the saying goes?"

"I had the chance of command, sir—and I was engaged to be married. I couldn't marry on my pay as second officer here. . . ."

"Precisely. You wanted to better yourself . . . and you have not bettered yourself. You have come a cropper—a pretty bad one, too—and now you want to come back into the service. . . . It is the old story. I have heard it until I am tired. . . ."

O'Hagan made no response.

"The fact is that you young men will never learn patience," said Worsdale, his manner less hard, more persuasive. "You are always in a hurry to get command or to get *married*. What use is a wife to a sailor? What earthly use is a sailor to the woman fool enough to marry him? Can he guard her? Can he give her com-

forts—can he even lock up the house at night for her? When he is at sea, what is there for her to do—what can she do . . . ?"

"Faith! not much bar pray for him," O'Hagan gave back, sore at this tirade, as he termed it.

"Pray!" The marine superintendent crooned over this, nodding his grey head. "And that means that her eyes will be red for him—if she is the right sort; hard if she is the wrong . . . well, are you married?"

"I am, sir."

"Hum! Had any chance of work since the inquiry?"

"None, sir."

"Any children—babies, for instance?"

"No."

O'Hagan might have trusted that grey head farther, but for some reason he had not analysed he could not speak of the moment now so near.

"Lucky for you that is so," Captain Worsdale commented. "And now, as I understand it, you want to come back here. . . . Well—I must be quite candid, O'Hagan. I can't put you on. It would not be fair to you if I did—for, with your record, your late record," he added with a frown, "you could never get command in this service. I question whether my directors would sanction your employment even as an officer after what has occurred—and, of course, in your case I should be compelled to consult them." The frown grew in intensity. He looked straight into the younger man's eyes. "You see that, don't you?" he added, to break the silence.

O'Hagan, sitting very still, his mind on Lucy's disappointment when this should be made plain to her, admitted that he saw.

"You are broken, my boy," the marine superintendent thundered, leaning forward and striking the arm of his chair. "I would not trouble to tell many men that—but you . . . well, it is the truth of this matter. . . . "Broken," he added with swift explanation, "by events. And the man who is broken at sea might just as well be dead. They have suspended your certificate," he enunciated, calmly satirical. "Do you suppose you can live that down? They have put you on the Black List at Lloyd's. . . ."

O'Hagan moved slightly under the blow, but remained quiet.

"Do you suppose you can live that down—without help?" he leaned back facing the light, his eyes stern. "They have done all they can to break you and you have helped them to do it. Man!"—he became irascibly the adviser at this stage—"if you wish to remain at sea . . . if it is *necessary* for you to earn your living in future as a sailor, go and induce authority to issue a V.C. which men of the sea may win—and when you have done that go out, by the Lord! and win it yourself. Win it! Then if you still wish to get back into the Eastern mail service I think I could induce my directors to overlook that bit smudge you've got on your qualifications."

O'Hagan shuffled his wet feet on the deck. He squared his shoulders with the phrase which leaped.

"Faith!" he said, "that will take me a month of Sundays anyhow."

Worsdale eyed him with large perspicacity.

"It's a thing you can do if my recollection is not at fault," he said in comment. "I wasn't your commander for nothing. I knew my officers—and if you hadn't been such a fool I would have had you chief officer now in the old ship. . . . Chief, man, a gentlemanly billet, a responsible one . . . and well on your way to command. And here you are ex-master of a wall-sided tramp with a marked certificate and no prospects, just because you couldn't rest content without dragging a woman to the altar. Man! it was the halter you were after—the halter," he reiterated again with heat, "and you have it round your neck."

O'Hagan scarcely moved under this criticism. The rain gurgling in the gutters ran past the open door and fell in rusty streams upon the dock wall. Greyness surrounded them. They were the centre of it; perched high up, examining its effect on their lives.

O'Hagan scarcely took Worsdale literally. He had served under him and was accustomed to what used to be termed "the old man's gassing." Nor can you, if you consider the matter, convince a man young as O'Hagan, thrilling still with the romance and beauty of his marriage, that he has made the mistake of his life. Indeed he had decided this long ago and was scarcely in the mood for retraction.

He knew (as who does not?) that the wife of a man in a subordinate position is termed an encumbrance; that

children are the last straw. For that reason he had come out of the mail service and taken command in a tramp where it seemed probable he would be able to earn enough to keep a wife, if not children.

Of course it was a blunder; but what sailor worth his salt would be prepared to admit it? Certainly not Denis O'Hagan, master mariner in the great feeding department of the British nation; now with a smudged certificate and nearing difficulty. The dark eyes of Lucy Faulkner came for ever between him and recantation; the knowledge that she would welcome him even now that he was beaten.

"What in the world induced you to leave us?" Worsdale grumbled again, his eye on the well-set-up figure, the clean face and cultured mien. "They don't want gentlemen in tramps, they want a chap who will kow-tow to owners and agents and all the small fry who run them. They want men without pride, or independence, or brain, by gad! . . . a sort of guard to slam the doors for the engine-driver who runs the train. . . ."

"I don't know that they want gentlemen in the mail service, sir," O'Hagan countered. "At all events they don't pay for accent if they require it. . . ."

"No—I grant that . . . but it is a gentlemanly billet, my boy."

"A man can't live on that, captain."

"You could, O'Hagan," Worsdale enunciated as he rose to close a port past which the rain sobbed, "but now you are married you must take the first job that comes your way. And if you wish to get back into the Eastern mail service"—he resumed his seat—"you must do something big to show shipowners, and Lloyd's, by Jove! you aren't the fool that inquiry showed you to be . . . and you must be in command to do it. . . ."

"You think I was a fool, too, sir," O'Hagan blurted, red to the eyes.

"I know you are not—but there are others who do not know you, and they read the evidence . . ." Worsdale commented, watching.

"If you hadn't come and spoken for me, I should have been damned," O'Hagan ventured, leaning forward. "I don't think it was quite the fair thing to pill a man. . . ."

"They were defending themselves. You said the ship

was unseaworthy—as very likely she was . . . but, good God, man! hadn't you sense enough to see that it wouldn't do to say so? . . . Didn't I tell you years ago that only millionaires can afford to speak the truth. You have the whole ring on your back. You have a Government department on your back. . . . Pish! Don't talk of it. Tell me what you are going to do—quickly, too, as I have but little spare time. . . ."

O'Hagan replied meekly enough that he hoped to get a berth somewhere, and that if he might use Captain Worsdale's name. . . .

"Certainly. Use it by all means. Refer anyone you like to me. I will do my best . . . but about your sentence, man—your six months', or whatever it was, suspension . . . what are you doing about that?"

"I threatened to appeal, sir—but I'm afraid the funds won't run to it."

"Then you must find funds. It is essential. What about the share you spoke of in this tin-foil ship company? Have they paid you yet?"

"No—I am told the underwriters have not settled the claim yet. . . ."

"And you believe that?"

"I have no option, as far as I can see."

"You have. The thing is a lie. The underwriters have paid. Get your lawyer on these people . . . and, look here now . . . not a word, mind—but if you can't raise the funds draw on me and pay me back when you have recovered. . . ."

O'Hagan rose, flushed as a boy, to stammer out his thanks. He had forgotten the more pressing necessity, the main reason which had brought him to see Worsdale, and in the enthusiasm of the moment gave vent to his gratitude in full measure. But Worsdale halted him.

"Never mind that," he said. "It is imperative to get that damned sentence annulled. The judgment was biassed—you helped to bias it. . . .

"It was a drab case, my boy," he went on more quietly, but very seriously, "a drab case on a drab subject heard amidst drab surroundings by a man with a drab title who was aided and advised by assessors with drab stipends. I would quash the whole system if I had my way. I would break any magistrate body who ventured to take away

the certificate of a British shipmaster. What does he know of the questions involved? What does he know of what lies behind? . . ."

He put on his hat and marched towards the door, which he opened. O'Hagan stood to thank him, then again the great little man turned and said in his ear—

"And if I may give you a word of advice, it would be, keep out of the canteen over there." He jerked his head to indicate the bridge to the dock station, and O'Hagan met him at once—

"I had to get a bit of lunch somewhere, sir . . . There's——"

"Yes, yes, I know; but you had something stronger than beef tea, and there are those allegations of the inquiry to be remembered." He took him by the shoulder and checked the quick answer which would have fallen. "Keep cool, man. Go canny, and if it is necessary to eat or drink when you are at the docks, carry a sandwich and a flask of cold tea . . . let people see that it is tea."

"You know me, sir—it doesn't matter two straws——" O'Hagan commenced.

"It does. I can't help you if you do not help me to help you. You have the brand of Cain on you. Put there, by gad! by a person who made a fortune by selling knick-knacks. Go away and get it wiped off . . . then I can do something for you and that meddlesome person who got you out of my power and married you. . . ."

Again the hot flush on O'Hagan's keen face and the swift rejoinder—

"She will thank you, even if I can't. If you back me it will be easy . . . easy as shelling peas."

"Will it?" said Worsdale, as he faced the rain going towards the bridge.

He frowned over the words—but O'Hagan rubbed hands. He was jubilant—jubilant.

CHAPTER XI

THE MEANING OF IT

Commander Worsdale, R.N.R., as he was officially designated, occupied chambers within a few minutes' walk of Lancaster Gate station when in town. He was a bachelor of considerable wealth who for many years had been Commodore of that line of splendid vessels known here as the Eastern mail service. Since his retirement he had acted as marine superintendent of the fleet. One could not well imagine the moment when of his own will Worsdale would sever his connection with ships. Had he desired to "move up higher" he might have taken his seat as a director in virtue of his holding in the company; but he refused to be bothered with business, as he termed it. He said he did not understand business, that he did not wish to understand it; but if the directors had no alternative scheme, he wished to keep in touch with the ships by commanding them when in dock.

And so, as was set forth, Captain Worsdale retained his office.

Now several days had elapsed since his meeting with Denis O'Hagan, and the fact that he had heard nothing from him rather troubled the great little man, as his officers called him. Each night on his return from the city he had made inquiries as to whether a Captain O'Hagan had called, and had received a reply in the negative. To-day, however, a message had reached his office asking whether he would be at home to-night. He replied in the affirmative; then came word that Mr. Stephen Hammond would run round after dinner to see him with reference to a certain Mr. O'Hagan.

Naturally Worsdale had very little difficulty in coming to the conclusion that O'Hagan by some chance knew his friend Hammond, and it increased the interest which he already acknowledged in that young reprobate as he called him.

It was nine o'clock. Worsdale, comfortable in an arm-

chair before his fire, occupied himself with an evening paper. He smoked with the enjoyment of one who could afford a good brand. On a table near at hand was the essential liquid. Behind it, opening the door, Jenks saying in his best manner—"Mr. Stephen 'Ammond, sir," and vanishing in silence.

Worsdale rose and grasped his friend's outstretched hand. "So good of you to come round to cheer me up—what is it, eh?"

"A mutual liking, I gather. Denis O'Hagan, to speak by the book—but I should have called in any case in a few days to tell you about the poor old father."

"Ah! How is he?"

"Better, I'm thankful to say—but it has been a wrench to turn out after all these years."

"I can well imagine it. It would kill me," Worsdale commented. "Come over and make yourself comfortable—choose your chair, there are cigars, cigarettes, whisky . . . "

"Thanks, awfully. I'll turn on a pipe, if I may."

"Do by all means . . . well, what about this boy?"

The lawyer's face became more serious. He stuffed tobacco into his pipe, lighted a match and said—"I don't quite like it," and commenced to pull. "As a matter of fact, the thing looks pretty dangerous for him." He dowsed the match and leaned back in full blast.

"What do you know of him—I don't remember your name in the case . . ." Worsdale threw out.

"No. We had nothing to do with that. I wish we had. . . . No—he and I were at the same school—Winchester, you know . . . and of course that counts."

"But how did you happen to know that—you weren't contemporaries, I should say."

"No. I was at Oxford in his time. He came to apply for that secretaryship for my father, you remember. We had about five hundred applications. Took us a week to clear up—and I happened to see him. He has rather a good face—don't you agree?"

"He is as strong as they are made," Worsdale replied. "I wish we could officer the fleet with his type. We don't get many parsons' sons in these days—they seem as shy of the merchant service as of the church. It was a good type. We thought it was going to last for ever, so we starved it out, and now we would give our ears to see it back."

"How? I don't follow quite," Hammond questioned.

"There was a day, my friend," Worsdale returned, "when shipowners openly bragged that they could flout officers with impunity. 'Officers!' a very big personage once said in my hearing, 'Phit! I could *man* my fleet with them by holding up my little finger in Fenchurch Street.' And that was so. But it no longer is so, and if that gentleman were alive to-day he would be the first to own it—and, between ourselves, to curse the new conditions."

"I gather, then, you are inclined to think our friend O'Hagan has been harshly treated," Hammond suggested, between puffs.

"Leading questions, eh?" Worsdale chuckled, enjoying himself immensely, his Scottish descent in evidence. "Man! You would seduce Auld Nick himself wi' your inceedious method of speech. It's well I know ye—it's well I knew your father and have respect for ye as well. Hoot! man, fill up your glass and I'll tell you fast enough what I think—fast enough, because I believe you are anxious to read what I know . . . what I learned when you and that young fool, O'Hagan, were at school."

Hammond laughed and complied—"I should not have ventured to draw you," he said as he set down the decanter, "but O'Hagan came to see me this morning and I tried to help him——" he put it so as he added Apollinaris to his whisky, "but I might have saved my time . . ."

"Um!" Worsdale broke in. "I tried that myself, but he didn't chip in. Is he in monetary straits, do you think?"

"He told me this morning someone has put in a distraint, landlord or tax people—I don't know which."

"Poor devil!"

"It is very shocking, of course, but I gathered he had nothing to say against the fairness of his trial, as he calls it. . . ."

"Fairness—no. It's the system he objects to—and I, as a master mariner of forty years' standing, object to. Why, he was tried before magistrates—*magistrates*, man!"

"With assessors, of course."

"Assessors! I like to hear you glib lawyer folk talk. You know what you are speaking of, Stephen Hammond—and I know, too, what I am speaking of. We are a pair of expairts, mind—you a marine lawyer, top notch, I a marine shellback, top notch, too—in the days that were. . . .

"Fair! Of course the inquiry was fair. No one in his senses goes out of his way to assail His Majesty's Commission of the Peace. But we do say magistrates don't know a damned thing about the sea, or sailors or cargo, or mails —and they never will know. How can they? It took me thirty years, my friend, to learn the first thing about ships . . . an' they are supposed to imbibe it fra assessors. . . .

"It can't be done. A position crops up at every inquiry that requires elucidation by the assessors—eh?"

"Granted."

"An' there are perhaps forty-five assessors an' each one will find a new and explicit vairsion o' the problem, an' every one o' them is the guide of your magistrate. I say you can't work out problems on a chart in court with or without a pencil and parallel ruler . . . at least, if you do, each man will come to a new conclusion from the same elementary facts. . . .

"The sea, Stephen, my friend, is like nothing else on God's world. It has a mind of its own. It works in its own way. Currents come out of no ordered scheme. The cause of them is intermittent and varying in degree. To-day they are here, flicking us sidelong; to-morrow they are gone, and to-morrow they may be setting from the opposite quarter. No two assessors think alike on the subject—how, then, is it possible that they should give any sort of coherent advice to magistrates who know nothing. . . ."

"Yes. I admit that. I see the difficulty."

"Of course you do . . . but there's more to consider yet. There's the question of how many men constitute a well-manned ship, and *per contra* how many men an under-manned ship; how deep shall a vessel be loaded in winter time, how deep in summer. There is the question whether it was wise to send a ship built for the West India trade on the Great Circle between the Cape and New Zealand; whether it is honest to send a Mediterranean tramp, manned by Chinese coolies, across the North Atlantic in winter time. . . . And there is the question whether deckloads are safe or whether they are a mere bribe to open the gates o' heaven to her crew. . . .

"How can assessors instil factors like these into the minds of men whose whole concern with trade is to make it pay. Make your assessors judges—put them in the

chair of authority and pay them a wage commensurate with their duties. It is a cheap thing this advisory business, and there is too much of it. Mind, I am not hitting at our magistracy; but on the other hand I hold no brief for them. They do what they can in extremely difficult conditions, and I would modify that difficulty by moving the finer men from our services, not to assessorships, but to judgeships. That would be better than retiring them on an allowance granted 'by the grace of their board of directors' when their nerve has gone."

Worsdale leaned back in his chair and pulled for some minutes at his cigar, then, as if Hammond had challenged him, he came back with—

"I know what I am talking of, my friend. I have been asked to sit at certain inquiries as assessor; but I have refused. It is an honour I do not covet. . . . It is a responsibility I do not intend to undertake—and the fees a man may earn provoke laughter from the big-wigs of your cloth who share the plunder. . . ."

Again he flung back in his chair to enjoy that cigar, to note Hammond's laughter which followed that point he had made, and to sip from the glass which stood at his elbow.

It was easy to see that he felt deeply in this matter. The Scot appeared only when he was greatly moved, and then it rang beautifully. It was easy to read, too, that he had a strong liking for O'Hagan. And as if the thought which lurked in Hammond's brain had passed straight to Worsdale, the great little man broke out afresh with—

"Damned young fool! I would have had him in command in no time, but he must needs give me the slip and get married to some woman thing who should have known better than to make love to a sailor. . . ."

"And why not a sailor?" Hammond commented, amused beyond words.

"If you care to know exactly my opinion," said Worsdale with clean-cut phrase, "I should say that there are two classes of men whom no woman with any respect for herself should think of marrying. One is a sailor . . . he's always at sea; the other is a literary man . . . he's always at home. You ask any woman what these things mean—and . . ."

There came a knock on the door and Jenks appeared carrying a salver, which he presented to his master. Upon it was a card.

" Talk of the devil," Worsdale quoted, half rising in his chair.

" Not O'Hagan ? " Hammond questioned.

Worsdale blinked and turned to Jenks.

" Ask him to come in. Bring him in at once."

Jenks moved to obey.

" Something wrong," Worsdale whispered.

Hammond admitted the suggestion without speech. Then in a moment O'Hagan entered. He looked pale. There was a drawn look about his eyes ; but directly he saw that Captain Worsdale was not alone he stood still.

" I didn't understand you were engaged, sir," he said apologetically. " Let me call at some other time."

The words were calm enough ; but his eyes gave him away.

Jenks crossed to the sideboard and returned to place an additional tumbler on the table. He retired as silently as he had come.

" You see ? " Worsdale smiled, the signals understood. " You are expected. Nonsense ! Don't run away . . . I think you know my friend Mr. Hammond ? "

O'Hagan, with a glance of increasing confusion, acknowledged that he had been so fortunate as to meet him only a few hours ago—" but," he stammered, " I did not know that you were friends—or . . . ." And here he abruptly paused.

" Not only friends, O'Hagan," Worsdale said, to put him at his ease, " but mutually interested in your case. To be quite honest, we were talking of you when you were announced. . . . Sit down. Take off your coat first, then sit and fill your glass. That man of mine is worth his weight in gold. Obsairve his grip of essential facts " ; he pointed to the glass, smiling, his eyes shining large behind spectacles. " Sit down. . . ."

" You are awfully kind," O'Hagan stammered out. " But I have only ten minutes—for I simply must catch the last train down . . . or——" Again he broke off, stumbling and aflame with the sense of his position. " The fact is," he blurted out, " Lucy is ill . . . and I daren't stay away. . . ."

" Mrs. O'Hagan ? " Worsdale questioned, sympathetic beyond all knowledge to the young man who thought he knew him.

Hammond rose from his chair and said, " If you don't

mind I will walk round the flat. I haven't seen that Turner you tell me you have picked up . . . and "—he glanced at O'Hagan—" two can talk so much more easily than three. I will order a cab if you will allow me."

He nodded and went out. Then Worsdale turned to the young officer he had known so many years and said—

" Now tell me all about it."

O'Hagan sat down suddenly in his chair and leaned forward, chin on hands.

" I'm broken, sir," he said, between gasps. " That's the truth of it ; they've got me between them . . . and I have Lucy on my hands. You told me I had played the fool . . . and I admit it. But if Sharum, Fit & Co. had been honest men I should not have been broken. I had a bit of money and I invested it with them . . . and now I want it and can't get it without more fighting and lawyers' bills. . . . I'm stony ! " he cried out with a wry twist. " Broke, by the Lord, on my first command ! and I feel like twisting the neck of that jibbering beast who stole my money. If I got near him," he hissed out suddenly, " I should hurt him . . . but," he added, with a curious droop, " he is as safe as houses. I . . . I haven't the train fare to reach him."

He leaned still deeper on his knees, staring at the fire . . . " God ! it's cold," he cried out sharply. Then in a new and calmer tone, " This is awfully kind of you, sir . . . but I can't stop. I must get back to Riverton at once."

" When is your train ? " Worsdale asked, with a touch of command.

" Ten forty-five, sir . . . Charing Cross."

Worsdale consulted his watch, rose and said—" You have nearly an hour. Sit still. I have something here that will do you good. Eaten anything to-day ? "

" I . . . I had my lunch."

" Sandwich, I suppose ? "

" And a glass of milk—oh ! I'm not hungry . . . I am stuck in the mud and can't get clear." He was a boy in phrase once more. " Please don't bother about tucker, sir. . . . I couldn't eat . . . I couldn't. . . ."

" You will eat what you can, and you will drink this," Worsdale answered, pouring out whisky and adding mineral. " Take a sip first and gae canny, my boy, gae canny and tell me, while ye eat," he thundered out, " what precisely is the matter with Mrs. O'Hagan, what

I can do ta help you," he stood, red-faced, to enforce his words, " an' why ye're daunderin' aboot town when ye tell me ye have a sick wife at home. . . ."

He sat again in his chair and looked under his brows at O'Hagan as he attacked the sandwiches.

" The wife's ill, sir," O'Hagan repeated, gulped and sat still. " There's going to be a baby," he added, a queer note in his voice ; " and we're down to ten shillings or so between us . . . there's a man in the house to see we don't get rid of our things . . . and . . . oh, well ! " he added, after a pause, "I came to town to get some money from a chap who lends. . . ."

" Jew ? " Worsdale inserted.

" I expect so. He calls himself Horace Marshall & Co. . . . but he won't part. The security doesn't seem good enough—so I'm going back. . . ."

" Go on eating," Worsdale ordered. " How much was the man to lend you ? "

" Fifty pounds."

" What security ? "

" My furniture and fixings, sir."

" A bill of sale, eh ? Take another pull at that whisky." Worsdale rose and crossed to a bureau, which he opened : " Never touch a bill of sale, my boy," he said, over his shoulder. " An honest man will not ask it as security, because "—he drew out a cheque book and commenced to write—" if the interest is unpaid it means that the lender can—turn—the—borrower—into the street and sell every stick." He spoke slowly as he wrote. And when he had finished he came back and tapped O'Hagan on the shoulder.

" Come to me," he said lightly, " if you want any more. Don't go to money-lenders. They would suck blood out of a stone." He tapped more vigorously and pushed the cheque under O'Hagan's hand. " Here—take this," he said, " and get that little woman of yours well again. Get her hearty. Kick that damned man out of your house and —and come and tell me how you get on. . . ."

O'Hagan shuffled in his chair. He seemed unable to reply. He looked up and opened his lips to speak—then suddenly leaned forward, his face buried on his arms, his shoulders shaking.

Worsdale drew back. He looked very stern, very cold, very still. There were lines over his nose which rarely

appeared. He crossed to the fire and stood looking into it. Perhaps he saw in the red glow pictures of his youth, pictures which told him why he had sympathy with this boy, why he had no boy of his own to father and prop on his way through life . . . or perhaps it was just pleasure he felt at being able to help one so oppressed.

Several minutes passed. The sounds behind him grew more subdued. He half glanced round and saw O'Hagan staring at the cheque—then in a great hurry busied himself stirring the fire.

The noise he made completed O'Hagan's cure. He rose from his crouching attitude, stood up, and came close to his old commander.

"I want to thank you, sir," he blurted, "but, for the life of me, I don't know how . . ."

"Don't," said Worsdale over his shoulder.

"To begin with, you've made it a hundred," O'Hagan went on unheeding, "and fifty would have seen us through. . . ."

"That is my affair," said the great little man, but without braggadocio.

"But—but how am I to repay it?" O'Hagan questioned, flushed and uneasy in spite of the relief he felt.

"Have I asked you to put a date to it? Give me an I.O.U. if it eases your conscience . . . but I warn you I shall destroy it as soon as you are gone from the room."

"You are so kind to me," O'Hagan faltered, "that I am at my wits' end . . . but, you see, it's a hundred, and fifty would have been enough. . . ."

"If I chose to make it a hundred, sir, what the devil has that to do with you? It's your wife I'm considering." He turned and faced him, to all appearance wrathful, ready to jump on him. "Go home and get her well," he shot out, "and if that is not enough to pull her round, come to me and say so like a man."

O'Hagan took him at his word. "I will," he said.

"That's all I ask, my boy. Good-night." He ruffled his hair with the gesture O'Hagan knew. "I'm more sorry to-night that you left us," he said, "than for anything that I can remember . . . now get away to your train."

When Hammond rejoined his friend he discovered him marching up and down the room, his gaze bent on the carpet, his hands clasped behind him. He no longer

smoked, but glanced up with a jerk which suggested complete immersion.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I was like to forget one friend in another. Draw up—draw up to the fire. Why did ye run away? Did ye see the picture? Not much to look at—now, must have been fine, though, when he painted it . . . come in to the fire . . . come in and bear with me awhile—whiles I talk. . . . Man! he was *hungry*. He eat like a wolf I tell you. . . . Eat and said he didn't want anything . . . had had his lunch—a wee bun o' sorts an' a glass of milk! Him! And he wants a beefsteak if ever man wanted it. . . . Hoots! sit doon—sit doon, there'a good fellow, and concoct some way o' getting him whitewashed——"

"I was thinking of that—only I called it clearing him," Hammond put in.

"Ca' it what ye like—but make it effective . . . make it a pairmanency—make it so that no magistrate body can take the bread out of a British shipmaster's mouth by suspending him. . . ."

"It will be difficult—and with the House occupied year in and year out with Ireland. . . ."

"We have ta find a way," Worsdale said plainly. "If I petition the President o' the Board o' Trade myself . . . if I am compelled to carry it tae the King's ear privately, I shall do it—for I look upon it as my plain duty . . . nothing less. . . .

"This young fool is only one of many. I have known cases where the man had less than nothing a year—when he had tae pay interest, in other words, on the money he borrowit tae defend himself and to pay his share of the costs —— interest out of nothing; for he dropped—starved and went ta hell out West. Never another billet did he get at sea and the jobs he was able tae do just haundered him—haundered him. . . ."

"I see the point—but there must be a judge of sorts. What about courts ruled by a stipendiary?"

"Here and there may be a good one," Worsdale answered at once. "I have knowledge of one, at all events, who is straight and outspoken in his condemnation of a certain class of shipowner; but we want to put it on a different plane. We want to take it oot of the hands of courts which deal wi' the drunk and the disorderly. We want to lift the men in the Merchant Service, not to bludgeon

them ; we want to make them nearer the level of the officers in His Majesty's Service, not drum them into the gutter ; because, forsooth, one or the other of them has committed an error of judgment and put his ship on the rocks. . . .

" You want to make your officer feel that he is treated as a man, not as a creeminal ; and if you must punish him, punish him in some way which will not drive him headlong tae the devil. . . . Hoots ! " said Worsdale with point and emphasis, " the only difference there is to-day between a trial for a criminal offence and an inquiry into the cause of the loss of a ship at sea, is, that you feed and clothe the criminal you have captured and imprisoned, and you condemn ta starvation the officer you have found guilty o' an error o' judgment. . . ."

" But surely a man condemned as you say, can even now appeal . . ."

" Appeal ! An' whaur's the money for an appeal ta come from, Stephen Hammond ? Think it oot . . . what does it cost ? I'll want to know for I'm thinkin' o' putting yon young fool in your hands to clear . . . Hoo can he appeal ? Here's a concrete case. He's blistered by this damned business. Teegether, he tells me, his an' his wife's resources amount now, ta seventy-five pounds per annum, an' the rent and taxes due on his house run to nearly fifty . . .

" Appeal ! " Worsdale leaned forward and stirred the fire—" how can he appeal ? "

" *In forma pauperis*—perhaps it would be possible."

" How many would . . . has it ever been done ? Man ! these men are sailors," was Worsdale's scathing comment.

Hammond was content to allow him to talk, as he would not do unless things were made easy for him.

" Sailors ! " he ejaculated again, " and your court treats him as a criminal . . . ou aye ! I know, I know. I haven't been in command for forty years without lairning a little here an' awa' aside my profession. Sit ye still, Stephen Hammond, whiles I tell ye how it appears to me—an old sailor, mind—an old sailor wha's not ashamed of his calling.

" I want you to follow my argument. I said you fed your criminal and you starved your officer—well, is it not so ? Do you not take your prisoner, a malefactor mind, and lodge and feed him at the nation's expense—" he had returned to his sarcastic intonation, to his finer

manner for a moment. "If he proves tractable he is put in touch with a library, perhaps with a billiard room, you begin to teach him a trade; but the officer who has lost his ship you do not put away. You give him his freedom; but you take away from him his certificate—the parchment record of his capacity which he has earned by sweat and tears, and with it you take away his means of existence . . .

"Oh! he is free as the air, my friend, and may live on it. He is free as any hooligan of the streets and may live in the same fashion. After rubbing shoulders with criminals in the court where his case was heard he is debarred access to the porridge and skilly of the jail. Instead of being helped to learn a trade you definitely take from him the means of prosecuting the only one he knows. During the expiation of his fault, or crime, or stupidity—take it as you will—he is condemned to a process of slow starvation, while the criminal is lodged and fed and kept warm. And that, if you will allow me to say so, is the sole difference between a trial for a criminal offence, and an inquiry . . ."

"I agree it's pretty rotten," Hammond admitted as Worsdale leaned back in his chair. "I confess I haven't considered it quite from that point of view."

"Who has—until it touches him?" Worsdale asked.

"It has never touched you," Hammond smiled.

"No—but it touched my brother long ago . . . and it finished him. Let it go at that. Think over what I have said to you—and remember that young fool who was here just now is hit pretty hard. He is on the Black List. I don't think he knows quite what that means yet . . . and his wife is to put a baby in his arms sometime soon. And—beyond and ahead of all that—I want you to remember he's a Celt."

CHAPTER XII

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

Denis O'Hagan came down the path that night with a "Coo-ee!" so blithe that Lucy, had she been up to greet him, would have run to his arms; but now the upstairs windows were lighted, the blinds drawn, and O'Hagan saw shadows moving within her room. He wondered why.

He crossed the tiled pathway leading to his house on tiptoe, and faced the opening door with a new terror thrilling him. What was wrong? For the moment money troubles had ceased to weigh him down. During his journey he had planned the removal of that individual who oppressed them and lived on them. He had dozed, out of sheer weariness, in the new security granted him by the immense goodness of his old commander. Nearly he had slept; but the excitement he found in picturing Lucy's face when he told her his news, or she had at last successfully guessed, kept him awake.

And now what had happened? He faced a dark passage and groped towards the drawing-room door. Had the beasts cleared him out? Had they dared to touch his things during his absence? He felt tigerish as the question passed. Deep in his breast stirred the lessons he had learned as a boy at sea. Lessons of swift reprisal, stern punishment—the satisfactory thrill of delivering a knock-down blow which is efficient. His teeth were clenched as he found the handle and opened the door. Darkness confronted him. He sought for a match and something stirred over there by the fireless grate. His nerves were on edge, but he controlled himself to say sternly—"Who is there?" and at the same moment struck a match.

Mrs. Portland Lodge, as they called her in the abandon of youth, rose as he glared under the lighted match.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she smiled. "I'm afraid I dozed—an' I really did mean to keep awake till you came . . ."

" It's awfully good of you to—to say so," Denis said, because it was obvious she expected some reply, " but if you would't mind," he reached up and lighted the gas, " telling me what has happened, I shall be . . . Well. you see I have just got back from a day in town and I left . . ."

" Oh, we got rid of *him*," said Mrs. Sykes with a little gleam of delight. " I 'appened to call, you see, to ask how your good lady was gettin' on and I heard about your trouble."

She referred to the man in possession with this phrase.

" It is very kind of you to take an interest in our worries," O'Hagan said with what patience he could assume.

" Oh, we couldn't help not takin' an interest," Mrs. Sykes gave back, " knowin' what was goin' to 'appen so soon . . . an' knowin' as we were bound to, my 'usband being a pilot as you remember I'm sure, of the way they served you at that inquiry after you lost your ship. So I says to William this morning—not long after you went by Portland Lodge, I'm goin' in to The Deodars, presently. I felt I must . . . she'll be all alone again to-day . . . an' I'm sure, William, I said, it can't be long . . . an' it's lucky I did, captain, very lucky . . ."

O'Hagan listened quaking. Mrs. Sykes was bustling and competent, a woman of many experiences and giant girth ; but with kind eyes and a tender heart somewhere amidst the adipose with which she was clothed.

" Of course," said Mrs. Sykes, " I see in a minute what was goin' to 'appen—an' I sent round to Doctor Marsden an' fetched the nurse an' got it all in readiness for whatever might 'appen," it sounded like the arrival of a cyclone in O'Hagan's ears. He pictured instantly a valorous bustling, strange to consider in the presence of so large a person ; but the image failed quickly. He found himself asking with a very hushed voice where Mrs. O'Hagan was, and whether it would be possible to see her. This pointed, although it was not his belief, to the suggestion that Mrs. Portland Lodge was her rightful guardian.

" Where ? " echoed the lady, beaming massively, " oh, she's in bed *now ;* she's been up and about till quite late, an' the doctor's been in twice to-day and will be stayin', I expect . . . I hope you don't mind my havin' taken so much upon me—but I *couldn't* see all your

trouble an' *this* comin' on an' sit still. I don't like interferin' Captain—nor doesn't William ; but there are times when . . . ."

O'Hagan reached out and took her hand—" Mind ? " he said in that quiet voice he scarcely knew as his own, " indeed I am very much obliged to you and I thank you with all my heart. I had to go to London, you see, because. . . ." He halted unable to explain exactly why he had found it necessary to go at such a moment. " Of course," he added, " if I had foreseen this I should have tried to get back earlier."

" The worse part was 'ow to get rid of that man . . . you don't mind me tellin' you, but I'd rather tell you myself I knew, than let you think it dropped from heaven ; or the county councillors which owns the water works has let it pass. No such thing 'appened. What did 'appen made me burn. It was just after I came back with the nurse and I went to the window to look out, and there's a group o' them lazy good-fer-nothings as call themselves workmen—municipal workmen if you please, lighting their pipes and preparin' to cut off your supply.

" I went down to them an' called for the foreman—a civil spoken man he was I will say—an' I said to him ' You dare cut the supply an' I'll summons you.' ' I've got to, it's my order,' he says, an' he outs with his paper in proof. ' Never you mind that,' says I, but just go back to your office an' tell them they mustn't cut off the supply. Say I *dare* them to do it seein' a baby will be born perhaps to-night—an' water we must 'ave.' ' Tell them,' I says, ' that if that isn't good enough for them, to send their bill in to me and I will pay it seein' Captain O'Hagan had been called to London and wouldn't be back in time to attend to it . . . and that," said Mrs. Sykes with visible trepidation, " is what I did . . . I do 'ope you don't mind ! "

Mind ! O'Hagan nearly leaped.

He scarcely knew whether to laugh or cry. He was afflicted by a blend of the two forces at the moment ; but above it and beyond it was his desire to escape this kind soul's accurate descriptions of events and see Lucy while there remained time.

" Mind ? " he gave rein to his thought. " You have probably saved her life and me from the hangman.

Why, if they had cut us off I should have cut them dead. . . ."

Mrs. Portland Lodge lifted her hands and her eyes together—"Oh! I don't think you quite mean that," she whispered. "Oh that would be dreadful—I don't believe you mean it——"

"I mean, Mrs. Portland—Mrs. Sykes, I should say, that you are the kindest and most considerate person I know and I should like to thank you. . . ."

The lady's face showed smiling eyes and lips which more than smiled—"Why," she asked, "did you call me that?"

"Which?" he questioned, conscious that he had slipped "person" in a most deadly fashion.

"Mrs. Portland," she answered.

"Oh that! Well, you see," he explained twinkling, "when we came here first we didn't know your name and as we had to distinguish you from other . . . that is from others, we called you Mrs. Portland Lodge. I hope you don't mind?" he added—the phrase recurring unasked.

Mrs. Sykes tried it in several intonations and decided it wasn't half bad. It was toney, she considered on second thoughts. It was rather like the name of one of those gentlemen that are always writing in the papers where we die when we go to, or, she meant to say, where we go to when we die. She rather liked it . . . and Sykes wasn't the name she would have chosen if she could have altered it.

Meanwhile O'Hagan tried to look interested, or amused, as the lady's speech seemed to require; while in his heart he prayed the earth might open and swallow her—gently of course.

When therefore Mrs. Portland Lodge appeared to be running down, O'Hagan sailed into the silence with stun' sails set, as he expressed it, and begged to know whether he might go to his wife's room——

"Go?" said Mrs. Sykes, "of course, if nurse who's in charge, says come in. I should advise you to do so pretty soon as the doctor hoped to be back by twelve and . . . my heart!" Mrs. Sykes struck the casing with the words, "if it isn't nearly that already. . . . And I've been keeping you all this time. . . . I hope you don't mind—but I'll go 'ome now an' try to get some sleep," she sighed. "Sykes went away down Channel

this mornin' an' won't be back for a week so we're neighbours in affliction. . . . *Good*-night, captain. No—don't come out. I'll just run in as I am . . . an' tomorrow I hope it'll be all over. . . . Good-night. . . ."

O'Hagan snapped the lock with what restraint he could muster, pulled off his boots and crept to the upstairs landing. He listened, standing nearly breathless. With a gulp he decided there was no sound and ventured to tap very lightly on the door.

The nurse appeared in a newly starched gown which rustled like a breeze. She saw O'Hagan and nodded—with the aloofness of those whose function it is to attend on sickness.

"Yes," she said tentatively, "you may come in for a minute—but you mustn't excite her—only a *very* short visit please. . . ."

Then O'Hagan found the way unbarred and caught sight of flushed cheeks and very bright eyes, of two hands moving out to greet him and he slipped on his knees at the bedside.

"My Mem-sahib!" he whispered, but got no farther.

"The valley of the shadow, dear dearest," she made answer.

For a long minute they remained thus, hands clasped, Denis bowed over them. But he did not speak, nor did Lucy—fear, dread all anxiety had gone out of her eyes on his coming. No word he could have spoken would have helped her more at this moment than the one loving pet-name he found her. Peace stood between them; the eternal peace of faith and love and trust. Youth buoyed them. No shadows lurked—only memories made play, and they were of love and hope and youth.

He looked up conscious of the flying minutes and discovered her eyes intent on meeting his—she flushed slightly. . . .

"I knew I could," she whispered.

"Could what?"

"Make you look up, oh, dearest."

He rubbed his cheek on her hands with the mute anguish of a dog sorrowing over his master.

"I am so thankful you were able to stay," she said in his ear. "I——I don't think I could—have—lived through it——if you had been at sea."

" I am thankful to be here," he answered with his lips, and remained feasting his eyes.

" You look like a child yourself," he added, after a pause.

She gave him the old, shy look of gladness which no other soul had seen.

He leaned nearer presently and whispered—

" You mustn't bother about the—the money, Mem-sahib. I've managed it . . . we shall be quite flush."

She smiled up at him, her eyes at peace.

" I wasn't worrying, dear dearest. I knew it would be all right if we waited."

Then her face grew pale, she closed her eyes and the nurse bent over him, touching his shoulder.

" If you please," she admonished.

He rose and was about to obey, then with a swift turn he bent down.

" I must kiss you, Mem-sahib," he half sobbed out.

" Dear dearest," she answered, meeting him, " I shall be so comfy presently."

Then he found himself outside the door, fumbling in a partially lighted passage ; his head full of half-formed theories, doubts—the mutinous vapourings of one uncertain of his quality. He was jealous of the gate he had passed ; of the fact indeed, that he no longer ranked first in her necessity. He wondered what he must do.

Presently he discovered he stood again in the drawing-room. He saw the chair which had been occupied by Mrs. Portland Lodge. He shook up the cushions wondering where she had gone. The room was full of strange whisperings. He listened for sounds and caught from time to time the thud of feet overhead. The hour was ripe with terror. He felt for the first time in his life the desire for companionship—someone who could talk, something to relieve the tension. Then he discovered the fire had not yet been lighted, and went on his knees to rectify the omission.

And while it crackled under his guidance there came a knock at the window ; a light tap which made him look up. He rose at once, and hurried to the front door. Doctor Marsden entered as he opened it. He carried a case which gave O'Hagan a new lease of anguish ; but he only said genially—

" You've got back, then—I am glad, although, really

the best thing you can do is to go away again, or go to bed."

"Go away . . . go to bed? Good Lord!" O'Hagan gasped, unable to get the perspective.

Doctor Marsden viewed him with that searching glance which, from another man, would have seemed insulting.

"Hum!" he said. "I don't suppose you will do it—but bed, twelve solid hours of it, would do you more good than anything else I know of. Try it."

He took off his overcoat and crossed to the fire, where he stood warming his back.

"I couldn't sleep if I did," said O'Hagan. "Could you?"

"Rather."

O'Hagan looked puzzled. In spite of his knowledge of sickness and his acquaintance with operations as conducted on board ship, he was amazed at the cool attitude displayed now that Lucy was the patient. And he was going to trust her to this man's hands. Good Lord! He swayed suddenly as he confronted the proposition.

Then Marsden came nearer and said—

"This won't do. Come now—when did you have dinner?"

"I didn't," said O'Hagan simply. "Faith! I hadn't the time."

"Yes—yes—that's all very well; but when a man has a wife to look after it is his duty to make time. If you don't stoke up, at sea, the fires go out and the steam drops. Perhaps something else drops, too. You will be in the same case if you don't stoke up, but insist on walking and worrying into the bargain."

"I know," said O'Hagan.

"Of course you know—but why don't you act on your knowledge?"

"If I were to tell you exactly what I have gone through to-day, doctor, you would call me a fool."

"Very likely."

"Then I'll just hould me whisht!" said O'Hagan. "But I couldn't eat now. I had a good snack awhile ago—er—what about my wife . . . won't you go up and see her?"

Marsden had his measure. He saw that this thought obsessed him to the exclusion of all else, and decided to act upon it.

"Look here," he said. "If you will go to bed and take what I give you, I will go up and see Mrs. O'Hagan at once. Is it a bargain?"

Denis looked swiftly under his brows and said—

"Opiate?"

"No—sedative."

"I don't like them."

"Then I remain here."

O'Hagan took this in, after a puzzled frown. He was very near collapse, but he did not know it. He was aware only of an immense mental stress, an activity of thought which refused to be silenced; but so great was his desire to see the doctor mounting the stairs that he said—

"Oh, I suppose you are right, but I shan't turn in. I will lie down here with a rug, if you like—but you will go up, won't you?"

"At once."

O'Hagan took off his coat, found a rug, and halted by the sofa.

"Right," he said. "Give me the poison."

Then Marsden took a phial from his case and administered sufficient as he thought to compel sleep. O'Hagan lay down, saying, with a curious aloofness—"Be good to her, for God's sake—and give me a shake if you want me. Don't let me sleep if . . . if——"

"My dear man," Marsden said, with cooing geniality, "you leave that to me. Don't bother about anything. Your wife is wonderful. You are giving me infinitely more trouble than she will—go to sleep."

He turned to pick up his case, and vanished without further words.

O'Hagan lay very still. He had no intention of going to sleep. He had on the contrary a whole-souled intention of keeping awake. When you fight sleep some curious effects are possible. If you elect to fight a mesmerist, in all probability, if your will be strong, you will succeed in evading his influence; but with a sedative the case is different. With time it will assert ascendency—but the interval is prolific of encounter. O'Hagan once had broken a dentist's chair while under the soothing influence of gas. If he had struck the dentist instead of the chair, very possibly a funeral would have ensued.

And now he had no intention of giving way to sleep.

How could he sleep while Lucy was tortured—that is how he put it mentally—and he saw visions as a result. Waking visions which bordered one moment on ease and comfort and a settled estate; sleepy visions the next which conjured the little pits prepared, as in Dante's "Purgatorio," for those unworthy of heaven. He wondered if that would be his lot, and watching saw through green fumes dim legs sticking out of the pits and wriggling in air. The head and trunk of the poor devils he discovered were buried in the pits from which puffs of sulphurous smoke slowly pulsed.

Somehow he seemed to have become involved with primitive notions of punishment meted out to unbelievers by a Beneficent Ruler of mankind. Against that he rebelled, anathematising the idea of torture. Then again he lay drowsily champing the bit of content, talking with Lucy. He gathered energy and chucked a kiddy—quite a pukka little chap he was too—under the chin and asked him where the dickens he supposed daddy was going to find a couple of hundred a year to spend on his education. And the boy grinned, became ape-like and changed into a centipede which lay under Lucy's pillow, ready to sting.

A bulgy-eyed, monstrous centipede which grew in size until it became the pillow and Lucy could not by any chance escape it. O'Hagan lunged out at this, dealing a swift rain of blows which left him on the floor—and the pillow now grown past all belief, lying upon him.

He tried to push it off, and it became more large. He forced it to the floor, but it rolled back to smother him. He strained, lying nearly full length, his foot against the skirting, to push the thing away; but directly he released the pressure in the smallest degree, the thing rolled back upon him.

It fought now in its lumbering inert way for mastery. It took new weapons for the encounter and came at him armed with horns and immense eyes which threw a gleam of green light far out into the darkness. The lights became white. They moved with the precision of searchlights thrown by the forts on the Solent . . . like Cape Griz-nez, by the Lord! Like the Ile d'Yeu, like Scilly . . . the Seven Stones he had passed without knowledge . . . like the twin light peering through the mist from Lizard while the sea roared back from an iron-bound coast.

The light entered and rent him. He lay split and gasp-

ing ; spent, too, and mouthing foolishness—until presently he lay still.

The night droned on as is the way of nights. Steps sometimes were audible overhead ; sometimes for a long interval no sound was heard. Again dulled movements, the hum of voices speaking together and a long, low cry.

Denis O'Hagan answered that cry. In his sleep he heard it and strove to respond. A futile effort now—futile as the fumbling movement of arms which went out in search, which clasped nothingness—futile as the muttered commentary formed by lips which had lost the power of speech.

Dawn peeped in to look at him. A pale flicker of light very delicate and grey as yet ; but sufficient to show that he rested. It peeped in at the window of the room where Lucy lay, and discovered her emerged from the valley of the shadow, a man child in her arms.

And the light touching her cheeks showed a soft flush of triumph.

Phase the Third

Ticket-of-Leave

CHAPTER I

DOCKWALLOPING

Down by the edge of Soundings
That's where the sailors lie,
Flat on the floor like groundlings
To hear the ships go by—
Lift their heads to hail us,
Wave their arms awhile,
So the dead men watch us,
So the dead men smile.

A MONTH had passed and the most beautiful period of the year was at hand when Denis O'Hagan decided that he must waste no more time and money on the effort to obtain a berth on shore. It was necessary, he said one evening, after watching Lucy for the first time tubbing her firstborn, to wake from dreams and turn in real earnest to the task of finding a ship which would carry him to sea.

Mrs. Faulkner, who had come too late from Dorset to help dear Lucy in the "hour of her trial," as she expressed it, had now returned to continue her struggles with the problems presented to the wife of an Army man who has been shelved by his country. Neither Lucy nor Denis had wept over her departure. She had scattered so large a dose of pessimism, during her visit, over the difficulties with which these two were faced, that they smiled when the cab rattled off with her luggage. She had been so concerned, too, with the fact that Colonel Faulkner, "who is kindness itself, my dear," found himself unable to come to their assistance at the moment. The colonel was pictured as shaking a sorrowing head over the prospects of "that smart young fellow, O'Hagan," when in truth he was occupied largely with golf and the possibility of bringing out a new club, of which he was the patentee.

If that club caught on, as he was persuaded it would, the O'Hagans need not worry, for Colonel Faulkner was quite sure to do the right thing by his niece . . . but, on the other hand, if it did *not* catch on, then—well, the sooner

O'Hagan got himself afloat again and on the paysheet, b'gad ! the better it would be for all concerned.

That these were truisms Mrs. Faulkner was prepared to admit, and she shook her head very despondently over the prospects of that new club. In spite of the colonel's optimism, she had her moments of depression, and the night before she left The Deodars she considered it her duty to talk to O'Hagan, to "rally" him, so she termed it, from an indifference that positively amazed her. As far as she could read the signs Denis seemed quite content to sit still and admire the son and heir which had been born to the house of O'Hagan. It seemed indeed that he had forgotten that baby O'Hagans require nourishment and several other things which cost money, and could not be expected to live as do the cherubs who have no body to sustain.

Mrs. Faulkner was kind in her method of raising the curtain on attack ; but O'Hagan discerned that she meant to stir him, to put him on his mettle perhaps, as though that were necessary with one who, despite his faults, loved Lucy and that small son of his, and would fight for them while life remained. She could not understand, you perceive, why there was so great a difficulty in obtaining employment. Denis was not broken, as she comprehended the affair, but suspended. Of course, if a man was broken in the Army or Navy, and very probably it was the same in the merchant service, there was an end of him ; but Colonel Faulkner had assured her this was not the case with Denis, and that it could not be the case for a matter which technically was known as " an error of judgment."

O'Hagan, his pride awake and exceedingly alive to snubs, failed altogether either to ease her mind by explanation or to promise a more vigorous assault on the question of obtaining a billet. But with Mrs. Faulkner's exit he took the matter in hand. He told Lucy on that night when he was first admitted to the small nursery, that he should go up to town on the following day and commence the search once more.

Thanks to Captain Worsdale the strain of poverty was lifted for the time. They might rest assured of his friendship, and with that sort of influence behind him there was no doubt a berth would be found. Perhaps Denis could manage to pick up a job as second mate or bo'sun and earn a few pounds. Then, when he came back his

sentence would have expired and he would "get in somewhere."

Lucy, flushed and thrilling with the delight of a young mother who has succeeded in taking the place of nurse without mishap, asked whether this were really necessary.

"I am afraid it is, oh dearest," he made answer. "I mustn't stay about too long or I shall forget all about navigation."

"Don't you think perhaps something may turn up for you ashore now that you have made such good friends, Denis?"

"It is possible, of course," he said, in tones which denied possibility.

"That means you have lost faith, Den." She came near and rested her head on his shoulder. "I hate to let you go again," she whispered, "unless I can go with you . . . but I will not make it more difficult. Go and see what you can get, and then—well, we can decide, can't we?"

"Of course," he admitted holding her close, "I feel I must do something . . . or, or your people will be thinking you have got hold of a waster——"

"My people?" She looked up, scanning his face, and added on the information gained—"What has Aunt Mary been saying, Den —— ?"

"Nothing, oh dearest . . ." he commenced, and suddenly halted.

"That's one of the white ones," said Lucy with decision. "Tell me, Den."

"Oh! well, she is rather a croaker," he decided, "and if ——."

"If," said Lucy with a swift leap into the dark, "if dear Charles is lucky enough to make a hit with his club, you know, he will make it easier for you, you dear things . . . but if, on the other hand, it *doesn't* come off, I am afraid we shall find it extremely difficult to make both ends meet and . . . that it, my darling?" Lucy ended with a little clutch at his arm.

"You are a witch," he laughed.

"No," she said, "it is Aunt Mary who is the witch. No—I *won't* keep you back. Go and see what you can get—and then come and tell me what it is."

So on the morrow Denis O'Hagan started on his new attempt to break the thread Fate and some other powers

had wound about his path, by crossing the river and walking methodically from ship to ship as they lay in dock.

And spring was in the air. The trees were green and tender, the copses were strewn with bluebells, the scent of hawthorn came down the slope from those fields which lay beyond Riverton. To walk the docks when spring is with us is tragedy to those whose life is also at its spring-time. And in O'Hagan's case how unavailing!

Now in order that Jimmy Barlow might not starve during his nine months' holiday, the Board which is supreme in nautical matters and numbers among its highest members, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, an office long ago dead, but perhaps to be revived, granted him the use of a certificate of a lower grade. Jimmy Barlow therefore, for the time being, was *de facto* a second mate in England's mercantile marine, at the very moment when he was undergoing sentence for incompetency. Perhaps the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons when he is re-born will explain how these things can be. Jimmy Barlow made no bones at all about it—he had examined the ticket they had allotted him, tried its value and found it useless. He found indeed that it was productive of snubs rather than of consideration. He found it incapable of finding him a berth. He found, as probably the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons and the Archbishop of Canterbury do not know, that an officer in this situation is in the position of a glorified ticket-of-leave man, and that as a rule he is unable to make use of his "ticket."

To Captain O'Hagan even less grace was extended. True, neither he nor his lawyer had applied for a certificate of lower grade. Unless driven by immediate and pressing want an officer who has been suspended would prefer to try his luck in the wheelhouse of a mailship under an assumed name. Anything, in point of fact, rather than hawk from pillar to post papers granted by the grace of what he calls, the "Plaster Saint" regnant at Whitehall. Such papers carry on the face of them evidence of a man's fall, evidence of his straits. The Plaster Saint is hateful and anathema in so many pettifogging ways that sailors would rather seek justice at the hands of shipowners than at the hands of the Board over which he rules.

Even when in some fashion or another, an officer has

served his sentence, both Jimmy Barlow and Denis O'Hagan were aware that when he again came before shipowners, the certificate he carried would be defaced. It would be a document so torn and damaged by this inquiry which had hit him that it seemed possible his degradation was designed to send him to the devil shorn even of self-respect.

Jimmy Barlow had suffered as has been shown; but now through a stroke of luck—he considered it from this point of view—he was provided for; and, if he could persuade the Chilean owners with whose vessel he was going to run the gauntlet of seas very competent to smash her, he would "stick it out" in Chile, send for the "old woman and kids" and "chuck the country" known as Home. He was sick of it. He suffered under its methods of quittal. It had no mercy for people who were voteless. It treated what it admitted to be "an error of judgment" as though it were a crime.

If Jimmy Barlow were pluming himself on his luck, O'Hagan was scarcely likely to do the same. Dockwalloping lay before him for all the remaining term of his suspension. It faced him when he emerged from his fall, full of fight, and challenging the justice of his sentence. It faced him still and in his heart of hearts he knew that it had scotched him. He was not the same man. He must sue now where once he could bandy terms. He might not aspire to high command. He was the prey and sport of all that tribe of lesser lights which clog the shipowner's firmament. The tipster in search of a commission had marked him down. The "goddess" of the canteen had pity in her glance when he entered her domain. The needy manager of one-ship companies in search of a "skipper who would invest" had sent him proposals which he had consigned to the fire.

Money? O'Hagan had no money. A friend had lent him sufficient to keep him warm for a time and he must pay it back—certainly he had no money.

He was a dockwalloper. That is to say he was a person who wallops about the docks in search of a job, in plain sailor-phrase; but in dictionary terms a walloper is one who moves clumsily, who waddles about, one, also, it explains, who "kicks about as one does when hung up by the neck."

But if you had asked O'Hagan the meaning of the phrase

as he came dejectedly down the gangway of a possible tramp, he would have replied, "Hamstrung."

In the old, bad days of a plethora of officers, dock-walloping was the main occupation, when on shore, of those who desired to secure a position as mate or master or seaman in the merchant service of England. In order to get afloat it became necessary to commence tramping the docks directly you were paid off; to shuffle from pillar to post; to take blows and smile; to take in sober truth what came in order to obtain a berth once more. But now we have changed all that. The blows dealt in the old days by shipowners, by the Plaster Saint and by those Jacks-in-office whom the shipping interests employ, have rebounded and hurt the service.

Men began to question, as O'Hagan questioned now, whether going to sea was worth the degradation entailed in getting to sea; or in staying at sea when a berth had been secured. And in truth it was not. Yet because there lived for him and thought of him and loved him a girl so gentle as Lucy, he made no to do but marched and tried to smile; tramped gangways, interviewed mates and bosses and clerks who might know of a job and pretended he was not grown sick of the whole aim and object upon which he was intent. It touched him on the raw daily. The accent made a desideratum in the Eastern Mail Service was a disservice to him here. He became suspect as a "gentleman-rope-hauler," one of the species eschewed by mates and captains in want of crews. As well climb the gangway of a ship where he was known as the skipper of the *Sphinx*, or as a sea-lawyer.

Nevertheless he tramped and came farther afield. He haunted the docks now nearer London—the docks which once held the Eastern clippers, the tea clippers and the wool ships and made so brave a show; but which now held tramps which have a vocation, and tramps which have none and resound with the clang of iron. He marched and grew tired, marched and came near to being embittered, ready to cavil, ready to sneer, ready to throw back in the teeth of those who smiled a touch of that temper of his which so easily boiled.

Then at nightfall he would creep back to his home at Riverton and sit quiet with Lucy in his arms, or with his head on Lucy's lap, or listen to her as she read to him and strove to keep him from slipping back.

That danger always stood before Lucy's steady gaze, as the widest and most subtle. Slipping back is so easy for one out of whom you have kicked all pride, whose years of buoyant seafaring have tumbled flat, never again to be rebuilt.

CHAPTER II

THE ISLE OF DOGS

A STILL day in the docks, the sun high, swimming like a golden ball in ascending vapour. London at its worst, praying for a breeze to clear the sultriness, the heated atmosphere, the rolling clouds of close-packed smoke and steam and mist. The country at its best, clear to the horizon, sun-lit, brilliant with peeping acres, alive with patches of colour lifting head amidst the delicate browns of the Kentish hillside.

Over there in the south a windmill beckoned, its sails at rest beneath the blue; across that stretch of meadow-land an army of poles stood erect to tempt young hops to climb; down in that undulating sweep, acres of gooseberry and currant slowly produced the fruit for which the district is famed; away there in the west were the woods of Shorncombe, towering and resplendent with greens of the subtlest, the most delicate—and there, behind it all wound the river; London's river, the marvellous Thames with its maze of moving ships.

Lucy stood at the summit of the lane where a gateway provides a resting-place and points to the beauties lying beyond. Overhead the larks sang liquid notes of praise. Searching the land were the restless, anxious plover, and mingled with them gulls from the river dotting the green with white.

Baby O'Hagan lay full length in his carriage fast asleep and Lucy stood to rest after pushing him, staring now at the glow which hung over London; the smoke-glow which always marks a great city, wondering where amidst those miles of bricks and mortar, dear Den marched searching for work. Her heart ached.

As a matter of fact, O'Hagan had reached to-day that U-shaped bend of the river, once of considerable notoriety, known as the Isle of Dogs, but now languishing before its more notorious neighbour. Limehouse, you see, is very near, and now means more than a dozen islands,

with the dogs thrown in, to those who search for the light.

But it was neither as an antiquarian, nor as a politician in quest of veracity that Denis O'Hagan was present on this sultry day at the Isle of Dogs. He came up indeed by the Blackwall Railway to see Jimmy Barlow before he sailed, to wish him God-speed and get an explanation of the rather cryptic reference contained in his letter of this morning to a person named William Tipton. O'Hagan had puzzled over this at breakfast time and Lucy had knitted her brows in a valorous attempt to be of help—but nothing came of it.

Now Jimmy Barlow's tug lay in the West India Docks near by the tidal basin; and as the West India Docks are situated in the midst of the Isle of Dogs it is apparent why O'Hagan had come thither.

Lucy stood at the gateway overlooking Kentish gardens and wondering where Den was at the moment when he emerged from the Dock Railway and walked towards the tidal basin. He was dressed to the part and looked quite a typical sailor, as the saying goes. He wore a rather shabby coat, not because an overcoat was necessary, but because he had discovered that a tweed suit and a stick were known only among the "la-di-da's," and "no sailor would be seen dead in them." That is part of the dock-walloping creed. It is also considered wise, if you intend to obtain a berth by dockwalloping, to wear a muffler round your neck in lieu of a collar; to stick your hands in the pockets of your coat and make a sloven of yourself. Of course these things are quite easy to the rank and file of His Majesty's subjects in Christian England; but to an officer who has graduated in a service where "accent is considered of higher value than efficiency," it is not so easy.

O'Hagan, in point of fact, would never make an honest ne'er-do-weel. His training as a boy in an English vicarage, his laughing days at Winchester, his drill since, and those inherited, soldier-like traits which were his, gave him away every time he attempted to stoop. Otherwise had he never won Lucy.

He came at length to the dock side and stood looking down at Barlow's command. She was small, even for a tug, but adapted to the special work for which she was planned. The builders had "housed-in" her more

vulnerable parts, and she looked neither fish, flesh nor good red-herring. As a matter of detail, it may be said that O'Hagan blinked when he saw her. He rather questioned whether he had come to the right dock; but on searching farther discovered the vessel's name on her bow, very new and unsullied, *Casa Blanca*, while from the stern, drooping nearly to the water, hung her country's flag, the Lone Star of Chile.

He hailed her at this, although wonder grew as he took her in, and a man with a shock head of black ringlets pushed through the companion-way to shout—"*Que quiere?*"

"A Dago, by the Lord," said O'Hagan in his throat; then aloud, nodding over the impression he had obtained, "Captain on board?"

"*No se.*" The man shook out his ringlets answering, "Wot you wanch?"

"Your captain, my son," said O'Hagan with distinct enunciation, "*Capitan* Barlow who——"

The man turned in a great hurry—"I go make look," said he, and disappeared.

Then after a small pause Jimmy Barlow rose from the scuttle way and waved a cheery hand. O'Hagan observed that he was clean-shaven, that he looked ten years younger and that he wore a cap adorned by a new gold badge. He noticed, too, that Jimmy Barlow did not speak, but clambered along the half-round and pushed up a ladder which O'Hagan brought to earth on the dock sill.

"I've got you," whispered Jimmy Barlow, as he leaned his weight on the bottom rungs. "*Yo tener usted,*" he added as an afterthought, intending a passing dock official to hear that he spoke Spanish when he merely jabbered Levanter.

O'Hagan climbed on board and stood examining the rotund face of his fellow sufferer. He smiled broadly, all the humour of his race leaping to the surface, but Jimmy Barlow did not smile. His fingers went up with the old gesture to stroke his beard. Then he said—

"Dockwalloping, by the look of it," and shook his head his eyes registering concern.

O'Hagan nodded. "From ship to ship," he admitted. "Not much good, though."

"No," said Jimmy Barlow, "dressing the part don't do the trick, sir. You might as well try to get a job as a counter-jumper as a deck-hand. You've got officer

written all over you and it's no use trying to hide it. Had any luck at all ? "

" None," said O'Hagan.

" Tried the effect of a week-old beard ? "

" No."

" I shaved off mine—then went without a wash for a fortnight. That did the trick. I got a job ' lumping,' " the ex-mate announced.

" Gad ! " O'Hagan laughed, " if anyone had told me that Jimmy Barlow would sacrifice——"

" Hist ! " came abruptly, and there followed in monotone—" No Jimmy Barlows here, sir, if you please. 'E's dead. I should 'av mentioned it. Enery Tompson is my name . . . Enery, not Henry—an' I'm a chap," he hissed out, " wivout a haitch in the world bar them I sticks in wrong. Enery Tompson hat your service, sir, an' many of 'em. Come below an' see the cock-pit. I call it that. 'Taint much of a place . . . an' I shouldn't wonder if we finds it pretty yellow w'en we gets houtside an' 'as to screw down . . . come along an' see 'er. Might just as well be in a submarine."

The change was so provocative that half way thither O'Hagan broke in with the heartiest laugh he had sounded for weeks.

" Good Lord ! . . . anyone there ? " he questioned, still chuckling.

" In the cock-pit ? " the voice of Jimmy Barlow challenged.

" Yes."

" Not a soul, sir . . . not a soul or *you* wouldn't be here . . . come along down."

O'Hagan obeyed and found a seat in the smallest cabin to accommodate four persons he had yet seen. He glanced about, chuckling, and noting the scanty head room, the closed-in bunks, all brand new and smelling of the polish which so recently had been applied. He examined swiftly the tiny swinging tray, barometer, chronometer case and one small washstand ; while at the same moment Enery Tompson made mental notes of the fact that " the Old Man " had lost snap, that his laugh seemed less spontaneous, less cheery ; that his eyes had grown colder than in those days when first he came to take command of the *Sphinx*.

It was Jimmy Barlow who produced two glasses and a

bottle of whisky from the locker; who placed them on a small table which pivoted down from the overhead beams; but it was the new man, Tompson, who looked up to request—

"You'll jine me in wishin' the old gell luck, sir," said he.

"If I never drink again," O'Hagan answered, "I will."

"Good—say when."

"When — when, my dear Bar . . . Enery," said O'Hagan, with outstretched hand. "I want to keep my wits about me, if you please."

"It will be the last I touch," said the voice of Jimmy Barlow, "this side of Val-i-paraiso." He filled and took water, lifted his glass and clicked the rim of O'Hagan's, and together they said—"Good luck—good luck," and drank.

O'Hagan placed his tumbler within one of the squares known as "fiddles," which were fixed to the table to prevent crockery fetching away when the boat rolled; but Barlow continued to nurse his.

"I see you expect her to move, when you get outside," said O'Hagan, with a glance at the firmly secured rack.

"Oh! she'll move," Barlow assented. "She'll be like a tub in a tide-rip if I know anything of the sea. But she's solid. I've seen to that. They gave me a clean sheet and I just filled in what I wanted. They didn't seem to know much about what it would be like down there"—he jerked his thumb to indicate the southern seas—"but they made no bones about doing what I wanted."

He put up one hand to stroke his beard and found shaven cheeks, grinned and said, "I had to do it, sir," as though but a moment had elapsed since O'Hagan rallied him on the loss of his beard. "The builders," he added with dropped voice, "seem to have had a lot of difficulty getting hold of a skipper to take her out . . . size against her," he asserted, twinkling, "nothing else that I can find out. She's a good, healthy little packet—as far as build is concerned . . . but she's small—small to do the trip out there"—his voice became persuasive, and very flexile—"but she 'as to be got out, an' I've promised to tike 'er . . . an' I'm Enery Tompson, sir, an' Jimmy Barlow's dead as doughnuts. . . . So's 'is bloomin' ticket," he flared, "So's 'is lyin' discharges. I 'old none of 'em an' never will again . . . they all went into the fire w'ile I'm lumpin' cargo in the docks, up there along," said the

rasping voice of Enery Tompson. " I took in a stock of knowledge down at Tilbury . . . over there at the Commercial, too, an' I'm a chap wiv a bran'-new outfit ; one I bought from a bloke on the drink fer a five-pun note—an'," the voice jarred out, " an' I intend to use it from this on—down there," again the jerked finger to indicate those southern seas he would presently be dodging.

O'Hagan listened, throwing in a word of acquiescence when occasion seemed to require it, and marvelling at the change he perceived in placid, easy-going Jimmy Barlow ; amazed, too, at the facility with which he altered his note. As Enery Tompson he sneered and snapped through phrases which stung ; as Jimmy Barlow he was the mate of the *Sphinx* talking to his commander.

He sipped whisky, set down his glass and once more fell into the stride of old days.

" I got tired of humping cases, sir, slinging them and trucking them over to the sheds . . . and I got sick to death of being chased from one job to another by chaps called Union men, who wouldn't work with a poor devil down on his bare-buff because he hadn't a Union ticket. *And* wouldn't let me join the Union either, although, as God knows me, the wife and kids were hard put to it for a meal. Their ranks were full, damn them. They had no room for starvelings—the devil seize them—and Government pats them on the back and even the Federation can't say ' Bo ! ' to 'em. Afraid, I suppose. No—I didn't seek to get in there. I might if I hadn't been Jimmy Barlow—hadn't been on the Black List . . . 'adn't got a ' by your leave ' ticket an' wasn't down . . . down on the bottom . . . Freedom ? My God ! Justice ? I love to hear them jaw. England is proud of her sailormen ! Is she ? Then God help the chaps she despises. I've done with England. I've done with its blighted Government, *and* its Board of roosters all crowing out what they don't know of ships. I'm going out south and west as Enery Tompson. When I get there I'll send for the wife. I'll tell her who Enery Tompson is—she doesn't know yet, for I daren't trust her. I daren't trust any man but you, sir, and you are in the same boat, and may have to swim the same way as me. . . . Why, I ask you—what would happen to me if the roosters knew what you and I know ?

" Would the Chilean Consul be any good to save me

. . . or the Chilean President if he knew of me? Where would I go out of this snug little cockpit—ashore or afloat?"

"Ashore, if I'm not mistaken," O'Hagan answered.

"Just so. An' that's why, if you ask me, I decided to take on this jaunt. It's why I decided to burn my papers, clean off my beard, and take their offer of the little hooker they want ferried to the westward. . . .

"I'm on the bloomin' Black List as Jimmy Barlow. I'm clean and all above-board as Enery Tompson. As well be Enery Tompson as any other kind of damned loafer in England to-day. It's the loafer who gets all the beans, the chap that shirks his job, the chap that stands snivelling at a hand organ in the streets, with a ticket to show the number of children his poor devil of a wife has brought into the world. Oh, my God! I'm sick of England. There is no chance for men in England. There's a ring to keep them out . . . it has a thing at the top of it they call a Prime Minister, and at the bottom there's another thing called the Plaster Saint, and he . . ."—the voice of Jimmy Barlow died away and the voice of Enery Tompson took its place—"ee finks ee knows all about ships an' sailors an' firemen an' greasers . . . an' ee tells us wot we may do . . . an' wot we mayn't do. Ee passes a Hact an' orders a bit more tucker for the poor devils in the fo'c'sle, an' the shipowners 'av to pay fer it . . . an' they buck at payin'. . . .

"They sing out—'Hi, there!—'old 'ard—just come 'ere w'ile we put this straight,' an' the roosters come in wiv the Plaster Saint at their 'ead. Then the shipowners explain 'ow they'll go bung if all these 'andicaps are put on 'em. 'This-yer Hact of yourn,' they say, 'is just the Limit.'

"An' the Plaster Saint brought up wiv a round turn says—'Well, but what d'you want?'

"'We want deckloads in the winter-time an' we want to load deeper so as we can compete on fair terms wiv uvver nations,' says the shipowners. 'Take it,' says the Plaster Saint. 'Blowed if I know anything about it, an' don't want to—but take it.'

"An so," said the voice of Enery Tompson, a gleam in his dark eyes, "the loadline's altered, we bury Plimsoll out o' sight, take deckloads, an' go slitherin' to 'Ell at their forsaken Inquiries. . . .

" I remember the *Sphinx* before this new loadline was passed, but you weren't in her. She was a wholesome boat. You could get about her decks—but with two hundred ton more in her belly and a batty of cases on deck she's like a teetotum. You can't stand when there's a sea on. You can't work. She might be a grampus . . . and *we* have to pay for what happens."

He drained his glass and set it down—" I'm tired of all this," he said, with the intonation of former days ; " I'm tired of being sat upon and squashed by roosters that don't know one end of a ship from another. I'm sick of seeing the wife and kids starve, and so I'm going out in the *Casa Blanca*, and mean to stay there. . . ."

He rose and fumbled in his pocket, his eyes blazing with the hatred he described.

" If I thought it would do anybody any good to blow up Whitehall," he hissed, " I'd blow it up. If I thought it would do my wife and kids good if I cut my throat, I'd cut my throat right here . . . or if——"

He produced a revolver, and stood balancing it in his hand, as O'Hagan rose, too, saying authoritatively—" Wait ! Wait ! Don't play the fool, man."

Jimmy Barlow blinked, and set the revolver on the table with a gentleness which mated curiously with his words.

" No," he said, " I'm not using that now. If I don't manage to get her out I shall use it . . . or, if they spot me before I get clear of the dock gates, I shall use it. But . . . I'm not balmy. There's two hundred quid in this trip, besides pickings . . . *and I don't have to render an account of commissions to my managing owner*," he leered.

He opened a drawer, found cartridges, and proceeded to load with the air of one whose actions are all planned. Then, pocketing the pistol, he shot his cuffs and moved towards the companion.

O'Hagan followed, puzzled by his attitude. The sneering comments of the man fell with such biting precision that instinctively O'Hagan visualised the notion which Barlow had repudiated with the phrase, " I'm not balmy." True. Yet it was easy to read that he was desperate.

O'Hagan mopped his forehead as they reached the deck. It was warm in that cockpit of a cabin. It was airless, too, and on the foreside of it the tug's boilers hummed.

The Enery Tompson voice and manner was in evidence again when they reached the deck.

"Coal to the bloomin' bridge," said he. "An' w'ere there ain't coal there's water an' grub. . . . We'll 'av to go gingerly wiv 'er. One or two plices rather bother a man. There's crossin' from the Gut to the islands . . . that may be bad . . . an' there's the stretch between St. Vincent an' Brazil. After that we can dodge again . . . but the nastiest bit will be when we're froo the Straits . . . winter time too . . . Well—I guess we can pull through or pull out. It'll be easier to pull out at sea than in this stew-pan, where a man *mayn't* work if ee wants to work; mayn't follow 'is callin', an' gets stuck on a Black List by a frowsy crowd o' roosters as don't know the starn end of a boat from the bow. . . . Come up and see the bridge——"

He clambered over cases and coal bags and reached the small ladder. He was quieter now, more restrained, but the voice of Jimmy Barlow was entirely suppressed. He turned and pointed to the compass as O'Hagan joined him. "That's a Kelvin binnacle *and* card," he said. "They 'ad a thing there I wouldn't be seen dead aside. I made 'em take it out. 'Kelvin's my mark, sirs,' says I; 'if I'm to navigate 'er I want the best.' An' they give it. . . . There's the telegraphs, an' speakin' toobs . . . not much use to a skipper as can poke 'is 'ead in at the engine room scuttle an' keep 'is 'and on the wheel at the same time. Yus! she's small . . . no two ways about that . . . but she's a daisy to pull . . ."

He marched to the starboard side of the bridge pointing out details which O'Hagan understood and could gather at a glance. He seemed to be alert, to be watching without a move for some person to spring out upon him and hale him once again to that devilish region where he had fought to be allowed to hump sacks and so keep from disruption the souls and bodies of five persons.

A woman and three young children depended upon Jimmy Barlow. They were as the light of his eyes to him, and his burden. To hear them cry for bread was a knife-thrust in his vitals. He had risen in the night to consider the end that might be theirs. A boy and two girls lay beneath his hand . . . he shuddered as the memory recurred.

He had an honest man's horror of crime; but he argued

now, that the crime he committed in escape was less than the crime he might find to his hand if he remained.

And the sun blared down upon him as he stood there making his apologia to O'Hagan. The hum of the London docks was in the air; the glint of London's river made soft his eyes; the rolling clouds of smoke and steam fashioned pictures which only a sailor can read. He walked moodily up and down the bridge before O'Hagan, his eyes uneasy, his mind alert. And suddenly he halted.

A cone was hoisted on the dock head.

"Ah!" he breathed. "We'll do it. P'r'aps it's the last time I'll see it . . . a fine day, too, to mind. London!" He took a deep breath—"My God, an' I love it. . . .

"Kickin' me out though. No use for my sort . . . No money, you see, nothin' to make things hum. Wish I'd never seen it . . . bah! that's a lie if ever I told one—fer I love it . . . just love it . . . so does the wife and bairns. . . ."

He stretched out his arms with the action of one shooting his linen and looked quizzically at O'Hagan standing silent and oppressed at his side.

"Sorry!" he said with a jerk. "I'm givin' all 'ands the blues—an' you into the bargain. Well . . . I'm off now." He approached the telegraph and rang the "Stand by," then crossed and speaking swiftly said—"The wife's address is written down here in case you are able to explain things to her. I shall write, of course—but she doesn't know I'm sailin' . . . ner does the kids . . . an' I daren't tell 'em. Put things right for me, sir . . . an' oh! yes—w'ile I fink of it"—the mate had come up and the skipper's accent was accentuated—"see that coaster over there, the one wiv the rainbow funnel . . .?"

O'Hagan acknowledged that he saw.

"Well, I should give 'er a look up if I was you—there's a job goin', an' 'er mate's nime is William Tipton."

"Tipton?"

"Yaas—the chap as commanded the *Riddle* afore she was lost, you remember."

"I know," said O'Hagan.

"Think it out," the voice of Enery Tompson proclaimed while a wink appeared to point the allusion. He drew O'Hagan towards the ladder which he again adjusted on

the dock sill, and holding out his hand said in a hoarse whisper—

"See 'im before you decide on anythink else." Then with a cheery shake—"Well—so long."

And O'Hagan gripping firmly the rungs, mounted with the words—

"Good luck, Enery; good luck to you . . . so long."

With a tossed chin the skipper watched until O'Hagan reached the dock sill. Then he drew the ladder back and passed to the bridge. He looked over the new dodger and nodded first to a man aft, then to a man in the bows, and they drew in the ropes which had held them. The mate twisted the wheel. A single blast came from the tug-boat's whistle, a clang from the engine-room gong, and the *Casa Blanca* moved away from the Isle of Dogs to take up her station in the Pacific.

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM TIPTON

The *Casa Blanca* was a blob of smoke and a mast moving past the land bordering Woolwich Reach when O'Hagan turned from watching her and crossed the swing bridge to approach the collier with the rainbow funnel.

He was still puzzled by the air of secrecy with which Jimmy Barlow had wrapped his allusion to that rather commonplace vessel, but on consideration it seemed to synchronise with his attitude on other matters. He appeared to imagine himself the victim not of circumstance, but of a plot which aimed at suppressing him and robbing him of the means of earning his livelihood. The Board of Trade was concerned to snuff him out. The magistracy, or, as he termed it, the "roosters," had pushed him into hotchpotch when in justice he ranked equally with those who had never touched disaster. Trades Unionism, with a Prime Minister cooing in the background, attempted to deny him the right to work and earn money for his family in any other calling but that from which the roosters and the Plaster Saint had driven him.

To a man so harassed and drawn it was possible to assign a mentality which bordered on the ridiculous if not on the irresponsible. O'Hagan scented a bee in his friend's bonnet, but O'Hagan, with his "unearned increment" and backers, had not yet sounded the depths plumbed by Jimmy Barlow. A man without income or savings who is debarred the means of prosecuting his calling is at the end of his tether in all sobriety, and is likely to see red when standing on the brink of reinstatement.

So, now that Jimmy Barlow's tug had vanished from the neighbourhood of the Isle of Dogs, O'Hagan acknowledged to a feeling of security for the ex-chief himself. He knew that no English port would see the *Casa Blanca* taking shelter, should that be necessary. He knew that Jimmy Barlow would put as speedily as possible "the

three mile limit" between his tug and his pursuers, did any exist. He knew, too, that Authority was not likely to get out of its stride in order to harass Jimmy Barlow now that he was so safely wrapped against discovery. He knew, indeed, that now Jimmy Barlow's only enemies were the sea and the lashing of a gale—nothing more surreptitious, nothing less grand and indiscriminating in its march to victory or death—the sea and its ally the wind of heaven which have struck together and again will strike.

O'Hagan had a glimmering perception of the end of this forlorn hope of Jimmy Barlow's, and a corresponding anxiety. You cannot sail with a man and know him as comrade in scenes of mirth and danger without acknowledging a softening when criticism is in the air; a qualifying strain even when he embarks on stupidity. O'Hagan had already placed this adventure in his mind, and no doubt Lloyd's, who *inter alia* prepared Black Lists, would do the same as a "Special Risk" to be paid for by a special premium. . . . They acknowledged, in truth, what it was and is—a means of rehabilitation for those Bottle-fillers of the English who have come a cropper while filling the Bottle; for a man, in point of fact, whom the nation's laws has made derelict.

Vae Victis!

Well—no man is conquered until the end comes, and a forlorn hope carried to a successful termination in other fields has been known to find, for the victor, honour at the hands of his King, even so great an honour as the V.C. But in the field whereon Jimmy Barlow and all those other Bottle-fillers of the nation are engaged, the honour is less transcendent.

O'Hagan walked with disaster shadowing him, dogging his steps. He knew, if others do not, that there is no order for bravery at sea, no Star, nothing comparable to the V.C. of the Army. He knew of course that the Royal Humane Society's Medal was a possible incentive, if incentive be required. He knew, too, of the chronometer balanced watch of Lloyd's and the Board of Trade, of the stereotyped presentation and silly speeches; but he knew of no Star.

"Foreign countries can find a Star for their sailor heroes," he commented, tramping, head sunk, for the rainbow funnel; the German Emperor can summon officers of his

mercantile marine to Berlin and bestow with his own hands the German Star for bravery at sea, but Authority in England is averse to the bestowal of high orders or honour on men of her mercantile marine ; and the Foreign Office has been known to add its thunder.

They are the Bottle-fillers, these people. Permanent officials wriggle with the annoyance they cause. They are for ever asking silly questions, grumbling and wishing to be consulted. There is no need for consultation. Permanent officials exist to think for them, to give them their orders—based on statistics in which their President has no faith. Away to sea with you ! There is no God but God, and the Plaster Saint of Jimmy Barlow is His Prophet.

O'Hagan with knitted brows came to the other side of the dock and halted beside the boat with a rainbow funnel. A glance decided him and he climbed the gangway in pursuit of his own particular forlorn hope, descended to the iron decks and stood looking for the person known as William Tipton. An ex-master of the S.S. *Sphinx ;* a vessel now defunct, but still trailing the results of her legacy of greed.

O'Hagan had the air of an officer, it is useless to disguise it, yet was he clad for the occupation known as dock-walloping. His face was clean-shaven, his bearing erect, his accent faultless as in those days when he lorded it in the Eastern mail service. His voice, too, gave him away, it was mellow and round—the voice of a public school man as we say with pride and a stiffening.

He looked about him. The ship's deck was red with the rust of many voyages and cumbered by great stacks of hatches. The holds yawned wherever the eye alighted, and in the 'tween decks of that one which lay beside the gangway, a group of lumpers, men who work cargo, lounged, awaiting the signal to " turn-to."

It was the dinner-hour, and the crew, if a crew existed beside so much red rust, was below. O'Hagan could not have struck a more propitious moment, but it became necessary to find a soul of whom he could ask the essential question. He walked on, therefore, and in the alleyway beneath the jimcrack bridge discovered a greaser of sorts sitting with a sweat-rag muffler tied loosely about his neck to smoke upon the sill of an open doorway. O'Hagan

perceived a vista of dirtiness and the engine-room; but halted to ask for Mr. Tipton.

"The mate," said the man without removing his pipe or relaxing his attitude, "is in 'is room . . . uvver alley-way—port side."

O'Hagan moved on and, coming to an iron door bearing the legend "1st Mate," knocked. A voice cried out—"Yes—come in," and O'Hagan entered.

That is to say he stepped over the sill and stood on the other side of the iron, but a man already occupied the whole available dinginess, brushing with his elbows at his boundaries. He leaned upon a small desk in his shirt-sleeves, writing rapidly. He smoked like a chimney, and so did his lamp which was alight, glowing in a halo which twisted and changed colour in the draught which came from an open port.

The man appeared to be engaged upon his cargo register, a book as grimy as the room. He glanced round and snapped—"Want me?" searched his visitor's face and added in surly *crescendo*, "I'm busy . . . can't you see I'm up to my neck in it?"

The man's cheeks were shaven, but he wore a moustache and beard trimmed in the fashion known as "goatee." His hair was sandy, his beard rather more red, and his eyebrows bristled in a way which partly screened his eyes.

O'Hagan had succeeded in establishing a footing within this den and had closed the door.

"Are you the mate?" he asked; "Mr. Tipton. . . ."

The mate seemed to resent the question. Perhaps he scented an applicant from the cultured ranks of swelldom, one of those la-di-da persons who sometimes get on a ship's articles. At all events he answered with point—"That's me," and added in a growling undertone—"What d'you want . . . I'm not takin' on hands. Save your time and mine if that's what you're after. . . ."

"My name is O'Hagan," the younger man commenced. "I think you should know——"

"That puts me no nearer," William Tipton announced, but without a smile.

"I took over the command of the *Sphinx* after you left her," O'Hagan explained, "and Jimmy Barlow tells me——"

William Tipton withdrew his pipe and looked sourly at his visitor.

" Then you," he sneered, " were in the *Sphinx* when she went down. Pity you didn't see me before you took charge of her. . . . I might have been able to tell you something." He closed his cargo book, pointed to the small locker and said, " Sit. I have a few minutes."

He climbed into his bunk and sat amidst the tumbled coats and blankets, his legs dangling.

" Not much room here," he said in his slow, sneering fashion. " Bare room to swing your arms, let alone a cat. Stinks, too. . . . That's bilge water. We're supposed to get fat on it. . . . I'd like to serve it up to my owners for soup—smell thrown in. That 'ud coil 'em up. . . . Beggars can't be choosers, though. That's a notion to remember. If I'd remembered I wouldn't be here now. . . . I would be sailin' the *Sphinx* or at the bottom with her. . . .

" So you know Jimmy Barlow ? " he continued, head cocked. " Funny sort of a world, this. If anybody had asked me what Jimmy Barlow would have done when they altered the Act and put a deckload on her, I should have said ' He'll quit.'

" He saw the dido she cut—yet he sticks on . . . shows how much we know. . . . Guess there's more in that than meets the eye. . . . I shouldn't wonder, mind, if Jimmy Barlow expected to get command of her . . . but Jimmy Barlow hadn't a red—and you came along. Lord ! I could smile."

He emitted a thin chuckle, but his eyes remained without laughter—" An' you," he suggested, " I s'pose—put in your dollars in her."

O'Hagan explained that he had.

The mate's eyebrows seemed to smile.

" Got it out ? " he questioned.

" Not yet."

" Expect to ? "

" By hook or by crook—yes."

" I could smile," commented Mr. William Tipton.

O'Hagan flushed as was his fashion in circumstances such as these. He felt as a boy feels who is guyed.

" I don't say that without meaning it," he threw back. " A man isn't dead because he is down. I'll make them pay up if I sink every farthing I have in the world. No man robs me with impunity. No man. . . ."

Again came the sneering comment of William Tipton—

"Who's saying anything about men?"

"I wish——" O'Hagan commenced and halted as the other growled.

"Pour water in one hand and wish in the other—see which is full first. . . ."

"I admit I've had a facer," said O'Hagan, "but I'm not likely to sit still under it."

"That so?"

"You seem inclined to uphold the beasts," O'Hagan offered hotly.

"What beasts?"

"Sharum, Fit & Co."

William Tipton withdrew his pipe and spat upon the deck.

"That's a name," he said, "I don't use . . . it stinks. . . ." He blew a cloud as though he would smother it. "It stinks worse than that fer-saken bilge-water of ourn. . . . I'd like," he growled, eyebrows twitching, "to sit the Board o' Trade in this room fer a month. . . . I'd like to put the Port o' London and Swansea San-itary and Med-i-cal Au-thorities in this cabin with them, and I'd like tew screw down the ports and ventilators on 'em—same as they are on me at sea. . . . I'd like to make a blackhole for 'em—like Calcutta did . . . might get somethin' done that road . . . never get it done any other. . . ."

O'Hagan stared. The transition was so sudden, the sneering accents so charged with venom, the twisting eyebrows so competent to point behind each hissing sentence.

"Someone's got to die—if you want things altered," came red-hot from the pot of his wrath. "Permanent officials are there to keep their damned salaries permanent . . . never mind us . . . we are sailors . . . and ship-owners seem kind of treadin' the same road . . . what d'you think?"

He ceased as suddenly as he began. His energies were concentrated on his pipe. He pushed with one finger in the bowl, drawing hard, and smoke circled in the dingy room to cloud his face.

"If you are speaking of shipowners, I'm with you," said O'Hagan. "They want teaching."

The brows of William Tipton twinkled through the smoke.

"When the devil is hungry the devil eats flies," he announced, grimly sardonic. "In England shipowners

are the devil and we are the flies. They jam us down with conditions no other living man would endure. If we are mailship skippers they give us a flood of printed instructions. 'Be careful,' they say; 'go slow in fogs, go slow if it's thick and you are in the track of ships. Mind your eye all the time and don't you forget it,' that's the orders . . . but *if* you go slow for fog, or ice, or rain, or snow, they'll say nothing to you for being late. Only you'll get shifted. Shifted into a cargo boat and some other fellow will take all risks with the ice. . . . Right! We are the flies. . . ."

"Pity we didn't meet eighteen months ago," he threw out as O'Hagan stared.

"It isn't too late now," came swiftly in answer. "If you care to join me and go for them say the word. . . ."

William Tipton's next remark seemed to suggest that he had not heard.

"Trained in the *Worcester?*" he asked, his lids flickering down.

O'Hagan bridged the space and nodded—"Same sort of thing—only we cruised. Australia and back."

"Cadet ship, eh—and after that the mail service, I s'pose?"

"Yes."

"The line which looks on accent with more favour than——" his pipe conveyed the rest. He looked at his watch.

"The Eastern Mail," said O'Hagan. "I was a damned fool to leave it."

"You were," Tipton acknowledged, his eyes raking him, "and now you want a berth, I s'pose?"

"I do."

"Still suspended?"

"Yes."

"I can put you in as bo'sun. You'd have all day on, all night at the lamps, mess with second mate . . . what d'you say?"

"I'm with you."

"Sail to-morrow in ballast for Swansea." A hooter sounded somewhere amidst the crowded streets of Limehouse and the ship's bell marked the hour by two strokes.

"We are goin' to Alexandria with coal . . . then up the Black Sea—somewhere for grain . . . so they say. We might strike some plan . . . think it out?"

"No—I'm decided."

The mate slid from his bunk and stood once more.

"Guess it's turn to," he said in his slower drawl. "Be down to-morrow an' I'll get you signed on."

He opened the door with a clang, iron upon iron, blew a whistle and said, looking down the alleyway—"Turn to, there. Down below aft an' get on with your washing."

O'Hagan marched down the ladder stirred by the fact that without in the least expecting it he had engaged in the collier with the rainbow funnel.

So the world hums when you reach the Isle of Dogs.

CHAPTER IV

MILESTONES

Now O'Hagan was not destined to sample the lees in this boat with the rainbow funnel. In spite of his jubilation as he descended the gangway, another factor stirred which would render it stupid to take service as a composite personality. At the moment, of course, he did not know it. A man who has spent months seeking work is so uplifted by the fact of success that he does not consider second string chances. Yet they come.

The position he had obtained meant five pounds, perhaps five pounds ten a month; and O'Hagan, who had been accustomed in the past to give orders to a person recognised as *Serang*, knew no more of the duties required of a "bo'sun-carpenter-lamptrimmer" than he did of the path to the stars.

At the moment he was unconscious of this fact. It had not struck him. He remembered that Tipton had proposed it because of his connection with Sharum, Fit & Co. It was evident, too, that Tipton had no love for that firm. How he had squirmed at the name!

Not in a polished fashion either. Queer old chap! Well, it certainly would be strange if they happened to be shipmates; stranger still if they could work out some plan which would bring Sharum up with a round turn . . . "make him fork out, by Jove! every penny we have invested."

O'Hagan whistled. It could be done. He was inclined to crow and dance down there on the dock sill; then swiftly upon the throb of that glorious headiness came the recollection of Jimmy Barlow's note and message. He had promised to take them to Mrs. Jim, and on examination, he saw that her address was Panton Street. A thoroughfare this at the corner of East India Dock Road and Bearsted Road—E.

That sobered him as perhaps nothing else could. It

put him in touch with the other side of the tragedy. It set him thinking. He wondered whether there would be a scene. He need have had no fear, for Mrs. Jim was of the class which does not air its hurts, does not whimper, does not plead or bully for alms ; but seeks in some way —God and his Regents know how—to keep the wolf from the flock.

Panton Street, E., does not let apartments to people with full purses ; it ministers, indeed, to those for whom its neighbour, Bearsted Road, is too costly. You may hire a house, or a part of a house, or a garret in Panton Street, and you may live in what seclusion you can compass ; or you may dree your weird with all Panton Street looking on.

And here lived the little lady who once had been a governess and now was the wife of one of England's Bottle-fillers ; a man down on his luck so deep that he dared not tell her he was sailing.

When he got "out there," he would "send for the wife and the kids; meantime, put it right for me, and give them this." Those were his last words, and they troubled O'Hagan greatly as he climbed the dark stairs to reach Mrs. Jim's room.

She had but one, and here slept and worked the game little woman who would not whine. Here, too, slept her boy and two girls when the candle had guttered and fingers were stiff. No charity bowls of soup on this horizon. No visitors from the church yonder, nor from the chapel across the way. No one cognisant of the straits of Mrs. Jim but Mrs. Jim and her children. Even Jimmy Barlow was not versed in the sublime deceptions which were practised ; but he saw his wife grow thin, saw that her eyes were rimmed with red, and went his way challenging the aristocrats of the labour world, who ring-fence their house of cards lest it fall and crush those who are inside.

Vae victis !

The conquered are those who have no trade union ticket, who have no loud-voiced agitator at their back to air their grievances in the House ; who are unbanded, standing each one on his own two feet to fight the battle of Life ; who have no vote—if votes be of service in a world so wantonly hedged against the weak—who are unknown by charity organisations and will remain unknown because

though beggars in all verity, there still remains to them—pride.

Mrs. Jim, when at length O'Hagan reached her altitude—it was near the stars, and often the playground of East End cats—did not rush to dust a chair for him with her apron, nor did she sniff and apologise for the room. Three women were at work in it beneath a dim skylight. They were building shirts for Englishmen and youths—the shirts of Tom Hood's song, if it be not lost to us in these days of sham and subterfuge, and on the hob, in spite of the sultriness, a kettle spouted steam, and tea—tea of the deadliest—stood to stew.

That was their sustenance. It kept the woman and her two girls alive. They did not know that it also kept them drunk. They drank it to keep them working until the candle guttered, stitching far into the night; then tea and kettle, and mother and girls, sought sleep . . . sleep amidst the roar of one of London's great arteries; sleep amidst the smoke clouds of East London; sleep till the ragged cock, which lived in an upturned barrel with three gaunt hens, sent forth his challenge to the sun, and the Isle of Dogs, which is so near, blared drearily its chorus of horns.

Three women—one in all truth, womanly, and "with eyelids heavy and red"; the other two, girls, slim, young, delicate, fragile, suddenly nipped by events, brought swiftly from the country they knew and lodged here—school forgotten, friends lost, the woods and lanes of Merrie England a dream which faded.

Their trust in Dad was shaken. Perhaps. Who can assign and portray limits to the premonition of youth. Out of the void they had faced with friendly and careless grace had sprung a blow which stung. Whispered comment had touched their ears. It hinged on the word "drink." Dad, who was their idol, was assailed by that phrase. They scarcely knew the meaning of it, yet it shadowed their lives. They saw their little home follow in a sequence of disaster, through which Dad shrugged and shouldered and occasionally grew harsh.

They saw that he no longer went to sea. They heard there were reasons which kept him on shore. They learned to quake. And here, in Panton Street, the blare of East India Dock Road in their ears, they learned new lessons.

They learned that food was scarce; that it would be

necessary to work long hours for a few pence. They saw their brother go out to act as errand boy for a neighbouring grocer. They discovered that he slept out and that Dad could no longer afford to keep two rooms. . . . They were young girls who understood the delights of green fields, of hockey—and they were here!

Can you see them? O'Hagan was compelled. It gave him pain. It took all the sting out of the misery he had touched. He recognised that he stood in the presence of women who fought with death; that Jimmy Barlow had so stood, and that now he was gone on a forlorn hope which might, or might not, find him quittance. That is what he saw—and, in truth, it sobered him.

The dim light of a radiance which scarcely touched the whirling sultriness of the Isle of Dogs streamed in at a skylight which stood above the table at which the three worked. O'Hagan brought a touch of the outer air with him and they looked round expectant. Visitors, he supposed, catching the note, rarely climbed here. He questioned whether they would be welcome and said, with an effort which astonished him, "I came at your husband's request, Mrs. Barlow, to tell you that——"

Then he saw in her face that he could not break it thus, and halted while she moved from the table to meet him.

"My name is O'Hagan," he recommenced in explanation. "They told me downstairs I should find you here." He did not name the slattern who had directed him. Enough that he was here. He continued—"Your husband was mate of the *Sphinx* with me—you remember? And now he asks me to see you and to give you this note."

He handed the letter while the wan eyes of the woman read him page by page. He shivered under her scrutiny. He remembered that he was dressed for dockwalloping and imagined that cloaked gentleness. But the eyes of the woman showed no alarm. There was concern in them, then sorrow, followed presently by shock.

She said very softly—"Where is he?" then, as she tore the envelope—"Why didn't he come himself?" and with a swift uptake of breath——"There's nothing wrong, is there—no accident . . . or——?"

The two girls came nearer, cowering suddenly.

"No—no," O'Hagan gave back. "He is well and sends his love. He couldn't come—that is all . . . because

. . . oh, well! the letter will tell you, I expect. Won't you read it? Don't mind me. . . ."

Then he ceased speaking, because it became plain that Mrs. Jim's attention was concentrated on the letter she drew out, and that a slip of paper which fell from it fluttered to the floor at her feet unheeded.

It looked strangely like a cheque. O'Hagan prayed it might be. It was folded, and something suggestive of a water mark showed through it in a dark wash at the back. O'Hagan would have picked it up; but held off as the elder of the two children approached. He had a sense that presently there would be a scene. It flustered him. He would have run away; but he dared not until he knew that Jimmy had been able to do the right thing by these poor souls. . . . And he stood there waiting, expectant, watching the expression in Mrs. Jim's eyes, the increasing pallor, if that be possible where no colour lurked, and wondering when she would break the silence.

She broke it quite calmly; the attitude of one whom calamity, great or small, no longer can bend.

"Elsie," she said, ignoring O'Hagan, "Daddy's sailed. . . . He's going to"—she referred to the letter—"to Valparaiso. He sends his love to you, Elsie, and to Mamie too, and he hopes to see us all before long. . . ."

She gazed at the dim skylight which lighted the garret. Her eyes were soft. A suggestion of unsteadiness showed at the corners of her mouth and the two girls looked shyly at O'Hagan.

On the table was a heap of white, and amidst it stood a sewing-machine, some little boxes of buttons and tape—the whole apparatus of the seamstress who spins shirts as she spins her shroud. Nothing heroic. Nothing vivid, blaring or theatrical. Commonplace sewing, that is all.

Mrs. Jim had steadied her lips and now looked at O'Hagan, who still contemplated that cheque-like scrap on the floor. There were many snippets to give it company and a dusting-sheet spread beside the table helped to keep it hid. That is why O'Hagan watched it—but he dared not break the silence by movement.

"How long does it take to get to Valparaiso?" asked Mrs. Jim as she faced him.

He answered without subterfuge, judging it were best—

"In this case perhaps three or four months . . . it is rather too difficult to say."

"Why in this case?"

"Because the boat is not very large and he will have to hug the coast."

"That means keep near the land, doesn't it, Captain O'Hagan?"

"Yes."

"Is she a steamer?"

"Yes."

"Is my husband the captain?"

"Yes—he is taking out a new boat you see—straight from the yard."

"And why does he sign his letter 'Enery Tompson'?" asked the voice of Mrs. Jim, her eyelids flickering.

"Because," said O'Hagan, quite sure that now he faced the worst, "he is suspended and can't use his own ticket . . . so—well, you see, if a man's in a hole he has to do the best he can for himself and—and his wife and children. There's nothing else. . . ."

"So he had to take another name?" questioned Mrs. Jim, and the chair she sat on creaked under her.

"Yes." Then, as a pause ensued, O'Hagan added—"Of course, that was the reason he could not come up to say good-bye . . . come near you at all, in fact. He was afraid some one might see him and report—for, of course, everyone has enemies," he ended lamely.

But Mrs. Jim was not interested in the question of her husband's alias. She moved at a tangent, to consider his safety—as though it were of any use, now that the *Casa Blanca* had started on her way to the high seas, discussing that.

"Is the boat very small?" she asked, her eyes lifted to read.

O'Hagan was constrained to make the best of it.

"She is not very big," he answered, then made a dive hoping to break away from this for all time. "Look here!" he exclaimed, stooping to recover the paper he had watched with so much concern. "I believe you dropped this. I think it came out when you opened the letter. . . . By Jove! it looks like a cheque or something. It's yours, anyhow . . . do see what it is. . . ."

He handed it and retired again to his corner at the foot of the bed.

Mrs. Jim took the paper, opened it and read. She did not speak, but her face for a moment flamed, then again

became white. She opened her lips to speak, her gaze settled upon the two children. But no words came, and quite suddenly she seemed to droop in her chair. She sank and would have fallen had not O'Hagan reached her side.

The two children crowded in now, the younger of them crying, the elder—she was not twelve—on the edge of tears; but O'Hagan called out sharply for aid and in a moment they were acting under orders.

"Loosen her dress, Miss Elsie," he had gathered their names from the letter Mrs. Jim had read out. "Mamie, run and get some water, brandy if there is any in the house . . ."

He laid the limp body he supported on the floor beneath the skylight and climbed the table to open still wider the sash. But the fasteners were so set that this was impossible. He returned to the floor anathematising all builders, seized a shirt and directed Elsie to fan.

"It's all right," he whispered. "She has fainted—don't be frightened."

He was quaking himself and knew it.

Elsie waved her fan while he kneeled listening. Her eyes were full, but she worked with the method of a machine. She stared at the twitching features wondering, full of a strange awe. Why had Dad gone away as he had? What had he done that he was compelled to change his name? . . . She did not believe he had done anything. If he had Mummie wouldn't love him—and she did. . . . She leaned forward suddenly and clung to O'Hagan's arm —"Oh, please, please don't let her die," she whispered. "I won't grumble any more, I won't . . . I won't . . . please make her look up and say she isn't going to die."

"Fan, my child . . . fan!" O'Hagan urged. "Don't crowd her, but give her air . . ."

. . . .

Water was used because brandy would have been difficult to obtain by a child of nine years not born to the ways of slumland. A shirt made air because no window *qua* window existed in this garret housing three lives; because of all things granted us of heaven, air in Panton Street is as difficult to find as luxury or restraint among its inhabitants.

That, at all events, was O'Hagan's view of the position, and being a sailor, accustomed to give orders, the checks, facile and absurd as they were, in no way caused irritation.

He was engrossed, and in ten minutes, by some chance or other, he had Mrs. Jim sitting up again, the children hugging her.

He wanted to swear very badly, he examined the sash fastening instead. It was an abominable and subtle contrivance to produce stuffiness. Had the garret been his he would have let air into it, in the fashion he adopted with the fanlight at his own dear Deodars. Long ago, that! By Jove, yes—quite a century . . . and while he was ricking his neck over a skylight, which could only be opened with the aid of a crowbar, Mrs. Jim and the children made hay, as he put it. He gave them time to toss a whole field. Whether they did it or no he was uncertain, then someone called him by name—"Captain O'Hagan," and he turned round.

Mrs. Jim was sitting up, wan and very weary, but with a smile which did him good. She said, dabbing at her hair—"You made me—rather wet. . . ."

"I am so sorry," O'Hagan apologised, "I'm afraid I am a bit clumsy at this sort of thing . . . I say, but you are all right, aren't you—better, I mean?"

"Yes—yes. It was very stupid of me . . . it was about a cheque, or something, wasn't it? I haven't seen one for . . . so long you know . . . that it—it took my breath away."

"It *is* rather a fat one," O'Hagan smiled, perceiving trouble at the door and moving to descend the stairs.

"Very fat? I—I am still bewildered . . ." she pressed her forehead with unsteady hands.

"It is a cheque on the London and Provincial Bank for one hundred and twenty-five pounds, Mrs. Barlow . . . It is drawn by the builder of your husband's boat . . . the one he is taking out," he explained, "and if I were you I should get it paid in—somewhere," he stumbled here, aware that the wife of Jimmy Barlow had, in all likelihood, no banking account, and into his confusion there came the strained voice which said—

"A hundred and twenty-five pounds!" Then after a break—"Do you think he could spare it?"

"Easily," O'Hagan announced, with a decision which went far to stiffen her. "He will get two hundred for the trip, and the rest is to be paid when he reaches Valparaiso. Now," he persuaded her, "let me help you. I know Jimmy—we all called him Jimmy—wished me to do so.

I think that cheque ought to be in a bank. . . . It isn't quite safe here—do you think ? . . . and, if you feel strong enough I will charter a cab and take you up before it closes. . . ." He referred to the bank.

But Mrs. Jim would not hear of this extravagance, " The trams pass," she said, " and if you really can spare the time I shall be most grateful."

" Me, too," Mamie interjected, hugging her sister's arm.

" Mightn't we all go ? " Elsie urged, her eyes round and luminous at the mere mention of so great a treat.

" Of course," O'Hagan decided, " all or none. It will do you good, and, if I may make a suggestion, I should advise a week in the country. . . ."

" Oh ! Let's—let's—Mummie, do. And it's May you know, and the hedges will be out ! "

" Bluebells, too," O'Hagan trailed. " Think of it——"

" Bluebells ! Oh, Mummie—we may, mayn't we ? "

" Come and help Mummie bank the money first," O'Hagan persuaded. " That will take quite a long time. We can decide as we go."

And presently they started, two pale children accompanied by their not strong mother, for the first outing which had fallen to their lot since January.

Of course it is apparent that O'Hagan had very little time to resolve his own particular misery during this afternoon ; nor to consider the duties he had undertaken in that boat with the gorgeous funnel. Yet he was like a boy in the happiness which had become his. That five or five pounds ten a month he was to receive somehow became mixed with figures of much greater value. His billet, too, when he did not think of it, magically assumed an air and importance unwarranted by fact. He was cock-a-hoop in spite of what he called his dockwalloping toggery, master of ceremonies at the bank, host at the tea rooms which presently gave them rest and nourishment.

The sun smiled down upon them, through smoke clouds be it said ; the world became possible as a place of residence ; especially out there in a country carpetted by bluebells and anemones, where the hedges " were out," and whither they had decided to vanish as soon as their week was up.

It smiled on that careful soul who was Jimmy Barlow's helpmeet and it smiled on Jimmy Barlow's tug as he

headed down Sea Reach—that wonderful *Casa Blanca* which had emerged from a builder's yard at the very moment when the Barlow homestead had crumbled to a garret in Panton Street and sixteen hours of daily toil. The *Casa Blanca* kicked with her heels as she passed Canvey Island, she bowed to her first swell there and Jimmy Barlow extended his arms. He shot his linen.

But it took so long a time to arrange these matters that it was late, nearly eight o'clock, when O'Hagan reached that palace of his, known as the Deodars in Glenview Road.

A thin gleam of light touched the windows as he clanked down the pavement. It was not too dark to see that Lucy stood watching his approach, nor to recognise that she moved that little strip of orange paper we call a telegram or a flimsy, as the fancy takes us.

He came the faster you may be sure. Lucy stood now in the doorway, very beautiful to consider, very dainty in the old, old trousseau gown Den loved so well.

" It arrived hours and hours ago, oh, dearest," she sang merrily, alluding to the paper she held, and got no further, because it became necessary to accept his salute. And when she was free to continue, she added—

" I could not tell him where you were, so I said ' Will call to-morrow . . . was that right ? "

" Perfectly."

He was devouring the message with the air of one who is still incredulous. His eyes saw nothing else. It was a marvellous bit of precision, as comforting as that, by Jove, which hours ago he had brought to Mrs. Jim. It affected him in like manner. It gave him a chance. A glorious and wonderful opportunity—the thing he had fought for, prayed for and despaired of finding.

This is what he read—

" Call Oceanic soon as possible see me with reference to taking command new steamer building Glasgow. If out to-day wire appointment for to-morrow. WORSDALE."

And when he had mastered this, O'Hagan put his arm about Lucy's waist, drew her to him and took three steps in waltz time.

" Hurra ! " he cried out. " Hurra ! Hurra ! "

Lucy's hand reached his lips to check him—

" Kiddie's asleep, oh, dearest ! " she whispered.

Then quite suddenly O'Hagan released her and said in a new voice—

"By Jove! I forgot . . ."

"Forgot?" she echoed.

"Yes—I shan't be able. . . . I've engaged to go in a boat with a rainbow funnel—red, white, blue and a few dots and splashes thrown in," he particularised, watching her. "And it's William Tipton's ship; . . . the one I went up about. What in the world must I do?"

His voice had fallen away to a whisper. The brisk, inspiriting strain was gone. He, undeniably, was oppressed—but Lucy smiled.

"Will you be captain of William Tipton's ship, Den?"

"No—bo'sun—with carpenter and lamp-trimmer's jobs thrown in."

"And you couldn't take me with you?"

"You!"

He faced her puzzled.

"Me," she nodded.

"No," he shook out. "Jove! I had forgotten that . . ."

Lucy's arms went up about his neck, and his, following the law, found rest round her waist.

"Then you are not going to sail as bo'sun in a boat with a rainbow funnel, oh dearest," said the gentle voice of Lucy O'Hagan, "and to-morrow you are going to—town—to," she dragged this out with delicious insistence, "to—see Captain—Worsdale . . . aren't you, Den?"

And very naturally, standing as they were, cheek to cheek, O'Hagan said—"Rather," which is exactly what she had decided he must say.

CHAPTER V

A PROBATIONER

In spite of this ready decision, O'Hagan considered it necessary to acquaint Captain Worsdale with the mad plunge he had taken towards expiation by shipping in a collier. As soon as they met, then, on the following day, he opened by saying that he had promised to sail in a boat with a rainbow funnel, and did not quite know how to get out of it. He explained that the mate was relying on him to sign on at noon, added that he objected to making difficulties for a man on sailing day, then halted, his eyes on Captain Worsdale.

The great little man was regarding him with lifted bristles.

"You will do as you think best, of course," he remarked, and for a brief moment it seemed to O'Hagan that the last word had been said. Then there came to his tongue with a flicker of humour—"Faith, sir! you have me on the hip," and, as Worsdale smiled, "but you are too big a man to take advantage of it."

"On the hip!" Worsdale brimmed. "Lord, but it's well you are an Irishman. A Scot would not have dared to say that; an Englishman couldn't. On the hip!" he chuckled broadly, then with swift precision became explanatory—"I have no opinion of colliers as a means of getting a man out of a mess. They are born in a mess, live in a mess and die in a mess, how then could they get you out of a mess? And I want you to consider—for I don't think that even now you recognise just exactly where you stand. I tell you your name is on the Black List . . . the Black List at Lloyd's, and you throw it off with a joke. I tell you, too, that I have been at some trouble to persuade a friend of mine to overlook it . . . and you tell me you are thinking of taking a trip as bo'sun of a collier . . ."

O'Hagan refused to come in here. He knew Captain Worsdale.

"I grant you," that stern friend resumed, "the skipper of a cargo-wallah is not a very great swell; but I know the bo'sun-lamp-trimmer-carpenter-blacksmith fellow in a collier is just a cat's-paw. . . . In all probability you would be the dandy artisan," he expostulated, rolling the phrases, "detailed by Mr. William Tipton to put the rainbow on the funnel. If I know anything at all of life in a collier I'm quite sure you would be the fancy man to stencil the ship's name and port of registry on her life-belts and buckets. If she carries boats, which I question, you would be permitted to clean them out and paint the house-flag on their bows. . . . In addition, I'm morally certain you would have charge of the lamp-room, and the oil and the wick—together with the adze and maul and two cold-chisels which would comprise the carpenter's outfit . . . and you would be busy all day, and if the lamps are of the usual collier brand you would be busy all night, trimming them. And every soul on board," he rapped out, "from the skipper to the boy who brushes his boots, would winze ye for a fool."

He turned towards his table and pivoted back again to ask in his very soberest English—

"I suppose you have told Mrs. O'Hagan of your *alternative*—well, what does she say to it?"

"She says I am not going to sail in a boat with a rainbow funnel, and is quite sure that you, sir, will . . ."

"Of course . . . of course. Mrs. O'Hagan knows the difference between five pounds a month and twenty-five," Worsdale commented, enjoying himself immensely.

"I accepted it when there was nothing else before me," O'Hagan pleaded. "I was at the end of things—and the only reason I have for speaking to you of it now is, that William Tipton who is the mate, was skipper of the *Sphinx* before I joined her. He left because he considered her unfit for deckloads, and as he also has sunk four or five hundred pounds in her, it seemed possibly we might hit on some scheme to get our money back."

Worsdale drew a tablet under his hand and said—"Do you mean that Tipton found her dangerous with this deckload?"

"She came in swept, sir. If it had not gone, she would not have fetched home."

"Where was he bound?"

"Hamburg with the deckload, Hull with the rest."

"Damnable!" said Captain Worsdale, Then soberly, "A perfectly scandalous evasion of a law which already verges on stupidity as applied to our own ports." He wrote several sentences, looked up and said, "Give me Tipton's address," took it down and leaned back in his chair—"I see . . . yes, I see," he frowned, staring at the notes, then glancing up at O'Hagan said—

"That puts the matter in a new light. I can see the inducement. Still, I think you had better not consider it. Your money is gone. So is William Tipton's. If anyone could get it back Stephen Hammond is the man. There isn't a trick of that brood," he adumbrated the owners of the *Sphinx* here, "he does not know. It would cost you more money. You might throw away two or three hundred on it, and be no nearer. . . .

"The *Sphinx* company is wound up, my boy. You may receive a notification to that effect presently—perhaps a bill of your share of the costs of winding up. Mr. Tipton will get the same . . . and, if it is news to you, three other broken-down ex-skippers of the *Sphinx*, are still, for aught I know, seeking how to withdraw the sums they invested in her. . . .

"They resigned. Put it so. Sharum, Fit & Co. know how to make resignation an alternative for dismissal. No skipper can resist that. It is one of the methods by which acquisitive folk climb to power in the shipowning world, one of the tricks that put a stigma on shipowning—as though shipowning *per se* were villainous. Chut! Let them alone. I don't like the notion of going to law with these folk. . . .

"The Associations should move in it. They should bring pressure to bear—clean out their house and make it possible for a man to invest in the concern which is his livelihood without this devilish system of exploitation which harms the big men more than the small. I tell you there are some kinds of fish neither you nor I can handle without being tainted . . . But an Association, acting in the interests of all, could touch it—and bury it."

He leaned on his elbow watching the fire, his brow puckered, a look of intense disgust in his face. For several minutes he maintained this attitude, then glanced up—"I, too, am a shipowner," he said parenthetically. "If I could see my way to smash Sharums, I should do it with real zest; but they are going strong. He's a shrewd

man, yon, and the boom has aided him. Incidentally the Board of Trade made him a big present of tonnage a year or more ago—and he knew how to take advantage of it. That's competition. Ou aye! I hear he has opened a London office. . . Someone is behind him, of course. Someone who knows a keen business man when he sees him, and is strong enough to push him. . . .

"That is the curse of competition in unclean hands. The means are nothing provided you reach your end. Jesuitical! Well, well—now that capital is handy to him perhaps we shall hear less of this petty thieving, this inveigling of skippers, persuading them to invest and then pushing them into the dock."

He twisted his chair and closed his note-book, saying over his shoulder, "Now, I am going to be busy. What have you decided?"

"To take your advice, sir."

"Good. Then here is the address of my friend. See him at once and wire Tipton to find another bo'sun."

He rose and held out his hand, saying in his kindly fashion—

"This is your chance, my boy. Take it and play it for all you are worth. My friend will go a long way to meet you . . . but none of us are omnipotent here. If Lloyd's make a dead set the thing becomes more difficult. . . . I tell you this for your guidance. It is a possibility I do not want you to overlook. If pressure comes," he concluded with a touch of passion, "I shall know why. . . and we have decided to fight it—Hammond and I. Good luck to you. Pray for bad weather and—go in and win that star."

The star seemed very visionary and remote as O'Hagan turned into the throbbing London street. It danced before him, nevertheless, conjured up by the trust Worsdale reposed in him. His brain took fire at the bare prospect of again obtaining command. For months he had been as one numbed by long exposure, one silenced by the hum and jangle of a gale which had forced him to his knees; but now hope returned, he forgot Worsdale's warning, and with a touch of ecstasy strange to consider in that turmoil of moving traffic, sang as he went and longed to dance.

He had youth on his side, hope, strength and the

worship of a woman "too good for him by half," as the saying goes. Therefore he must win. Lloyd's? Let Lloyd's go hang! What was it to them or to any soul in the world but his owner, when all was said and done. He pushed back the blind which seemed ready to descend. If Worsdale and his friend were satisfied, let the world bleat—he would not hear it.

At this centre of shipping, distances are not great between the offices of one line and another. If you are conversant with the alleys which bind them one to another they are nearer still. But O'Hagan marched with the novices and came presently to the offices of the Pampas Line. He stood staring up at them, wondering at the name as he came under the portal.

He who was at home in the East must now set forth for the gates of the West. Pampas! The word conjured memories of his father's study, of the vicarage garden seat where he had sat drawing inspiration from Mayne Reid, Fennimore Cooper and a strange, small booklet giving coloured prints of the "Man and woman of Brazil, Peru, La Plata and the Land of Fire." Brief explanatory notes were provided to these woodcuts of nude and semi-nude barbarians—and now, it seemed, he was to regain what he had lost by entering at the gates of the Pampas.

A commissionaire met him, took his message and came back to pilot him. No hitch. Everything ready. Again he could have sung. . . .

The hum of the traffic in Leadenhall Street died as O'Hagan marched over thickly carpeted floors beyond the ante-room; but the silence of the senior partner's sanctum, as he entered it, seemed to suggest a minus reading. The commissionaire, cap in hand, spoke his name, closed the door and returned to the portico. O'Hagan sent a strained look about the room. He found the sun shedding a warm glare upon the carpet, which was of reds and blues and greens, he saw settees ranged beside the walls, a writing table neatly centering them and a slim, grey-haired man turning from the fire to greet him.

He looked up, indeed, from a semi-stooping attitude and encountered O'Hagan. He maintained that attitude and steady, oblique gaze for some moments. It was embarrassing merely because it was intense, concentrated,

the search of a scrutineer. O'Hagan did not resent it—but it cooled his ardour. He saw, too, that there was judgment and discretion in those eyes—eyes which were grey, deep, strong, sunk like caverns.

"So you are Captain O'Hagan," said a voice which matched in every intonation with O'Hagan's reading. "I have heard a good deal about you. Sit down."

And Denis, in a seventh heaven of anticipation, sat.

"I gather that my friend Worsdale is much interested in the question of your suspension," said he. "I am in sympathy—to a certain extent. Candidly, I cannot allow a matter of that sort to handicap my service, or the dividends we pay." He spoke in crisp sentences. "You see my point, of course?"

"The Black List?"

"Precisely."

"Do you think it likely they—they *will* raise any obstacle," O'Hagan questioned, the iteration of this suggestion throwing him back, back nearly to the dead level of accepting service still with William Tipton.

"One can never say. I hope not. In your case, from what Captain Worsdale tells me, I am inclined to think they will not. For that reason we need discuss it no farther. I wished simply to make sure you understand there is this difficulty, and to warn you, in view of it, that I cannot pledge myself . . . you see that?"

"Certainly, sir. I am not here to ask it."

"Quite. Now—with that proviso I am prepared to give you the command of our new steamer, *while* she is in the builders' hands. I want you to watch our interests, to supervise, in point of fact, her completion, and when she is ready for sea we can discuss what follows. Will you undertake this duty?"

The star sank steadily. There were mists about the horizon ready to swallow it. It faded, and in its place O'Hagan saw months of dock work, tramping, wrangling with foremen and surveyors, when his bones ached to find opportunity at sea. In spite of his disappointment he managed to simulate approval with—

"Gladly, sir."

"Good. When can you join? The ship is building in Glasgow."

"To-morrow—I can travel by the night train."

"Do so." McClure touched a button and a bell rang

far off, at the other end of the world it seemed. The head of the Pampas Line rose and said briskly, "Now I think we understand each other? It will be necessary for you to see the cashier. If you will follow the messenger he will direct you."

He held out his hand, smiled and ended the conference.

"We shall meet in Glasgow. She is building at a good yard—Clydebank. There will be no questions, I think, as to her seaworthiness. . . . Good-bye, Captain O'Hagan. . . ."

They shook hands.

The title mollified while it stung. It did not wipe out the smooth sentences with which the calm business man suggested his knowledge of the crux of O'Hagan's trial. But it failed to produce the retort which a few months ago would have leaped. O'Hagan was learning. He had a feeling as he followed from that silent room that he was on probation and would never again attain command; he knew that his face burned; yet he passed on and came at length to a room where sat the custodian of treasure; the man who added up receipts and doled out pay.

From him he drew "for expenses," accepted a pen and initialled a book; from him, too, in slow, hushed sentences he learned that his pay would be twenty-five pounds a month while in dock, that the ship would be ready to sail in August and her name—*Strathmuir*. The latter he confided as though perhaps he was exceeding his duty, and in the silence which ensued O'Hagan got himself disentangled from the office and once more in Leadenhall Street.

He came out confused, rather humilated, not quite sure whether he had taken the right road, and reached Fenchurch Street Station just in time to board a train moving away cheerily for the docks.

The precision of it all had ruffled him, the rows of desks with brass rails crowning them, the stacks of books and papers, the crisp and formal attitude of those with whom he had been in contact. Mental reservation was shadowed through all the phrases. "Recollect," so ran the admonition in O'Hagan's mind, "this fellow has lost a ship. Watch him very carefully." All over the offices were animated question marks, exclamatory marks which bothered him. He felt, at his exit, something less than

a man; a bit of mechanism—that was it, as he puffed down the street.

And that was his induction to the Pampas Line.

Once a captain of what was then called a merchantman, read himself in on the quarter-deck of his ship, precisely as in the navy; now he penetrated to the business quarter of a city, and learned from a cashier the extent of his salary. Nothing about the Grace of God, Lords Spiritual and Lords Temporal; no hint at the King's enemies or the necessity for discipline. . . . Eyah! That, too, belonged to the era of Mayne Reid, Marryat and a vicarage garden deep in the delectable heart of Sussex where, as a boy, O'Hagan had dreamed dreams.

The Blackwall Railway, chuffy and alert with the new methods, shook him out of this and presently set him down by the collier with the rainbow funnel. That dispersed all megrims.

He saw her for the first time as she really was. He saw that she was *sans-culotte* and shameless. When before he had visited her it was at the end of a weary round of failure. He was at the bottom of the ladder and anything promising work was a long way up it. Now he had reached the middle and stood there with twenty-five pounds a month to his credit. Therefore he wondered how he could have considered the rainbow funnel.

Beside the slim, smooth hulls and black and red funnels of the Pampas Line that rainbow thing seemed ribald. The same suggestion of looseness was exhibited in her gait as she lolled beside the wharf. She could not stand erect, forsooth! She had the appearance of one who has been drinking, and her scuppers spouted filthiness upon the placid and oily surface of the dock.

It seemed now that the boat with the rainbow funnel was a scallywag of the seas, and William Tipton, when he met O'Hagan, dotted the i's and crossed the t's to emphasise it. He stood wet and smudged with toil at the head of the ladder, a large deck swab in hand.

"Not coming, eh?" was his comment. "Waal—on consideration I didn't expect you would . . . must be pretty low before you touch the likes of this," he threw out an explanatory hand, as though that were necessary, "Think I would be here if I had your years and . . . and friends?" His vehemence seemed to point to some

other last phrase, but with the pause he let fall a sneer instead. "Guess not," he concluded, the swab dangling.

"Can you get another man?" O'Hagan questioned, refusing the issue.

"Another? Fifty."

"I shouldn't like to put you in a hole on sailing day," O'Hagan pressed. "I know what that means."

"So do I—in a liner." He drew himself up. "Don't fash yourself . . . we crawl out when we are ready. To-day, to-night, to-morrow—some time when God Almighty isn't looking. . . .

"You get along home," he added in the drawling snarl he had learned out West. "You are in luck . . . an' that's a dam sight more than could be said if I kept you to your bargain. . . . I know," he concluded, grim and uncompromising, "and if I stay here an' ain't drowned, Sharum'll know tew."

He strode forward to place the deck swab across a rent in the hose through which a column of water squirted fountain-wise into an open hatchway.

CHAPTER VI

GLASGOW

It happened to be raining when O'Hagan entered in the early morning the great city whose ships had carried him staunchly in all parts of the world. A thin drizzle fell from the mist canopying the Clyde; smoke ascended in vertical columns; there was no wind; but glimmering in the west the promise of a golden day. Well, well—the rain, at all events, he had expected.

He came from his hotel shaved, tubbed, and ready to absorb the place. Glasgow as yet was but a name to him, he knew it only by hearsay, as the phrase goes; but it was a name with which he had been ready to conjure. Other places exist where ships are built; a sailor, however, bows before the Clyde.

O'Hagan learned that years ago, when, as a boy, he clung to the mizzen braces as they squared yards in a gale. They were running the Easting down and a lean Scotsman dangled beside him, watching the sea which had boarded them—

"Three hun'ard tons there, my son," he yapped, "an' never a whimper. Hear her runch! That's Glesca's handiwark. *She* kens what like it is doon here . . . ither yards dinnot."

He spoke in a dull shout, his head slouched against the wind, of the Clyde's city as a yard. All else seemed inconsequent, and the memory stood in O'Hagan's mind by the sheer force of the picture. . . . "Glesca does it—ither folk try," he asserted, hammering it in.

Again, when crossing the Bay, not long ago, the Clyde-built *Saladin* came in with no more damage from the gale which slowed her than a couple of sprung ports. But boats "fra' ither yards" reached, if they reached at all, swept; with fewer men on their decks, without houses, bulwarks, bridges; and some were presently posted "missing."

All the world builds machines which float; but Glasgow builds ships. Even as some men build houses of Portland stone and reinforced concrete, so there are others who use corrugated iron and mud and wattles. In the East you will hear it, in the West; punching the seas off Cape Horn or daundering through the Canal and Red Sea. "There goes a beauty," "The Clyde sheer—look at her lines," "Keep them off the rocks and don't go full tilt through the ice and nothing will harm them." These are the phrases which stirred in O'Hagan's mind as he peered about in the "wee bit rain."

Of course, he was aware that efficiency at sea is only bought by a free relaxation of the purse strings. That is the law always when the best is desired, and even so, it is sometimes found inadequate. The difference between a ship built by a great firm with traditions to consider and a mushroom company is on all fours with the production of an Elizabethan mansion and a suburban palace of the jerry-built brand.

A man who is not cognisant of these facts were better off the bridge of a steamer either in gale or calm, and certainly should find no place during her construction.

O'Hagan turned to look upon the Broomielaw, and again his senses shivered. It seemed he did not know the Broomielaw. It was fine. It was lined by shops, and the river babbled at its windows. Plate glass received his shadow where he had expected to discover smudges, a crude assortment of "drinking shops," and tatterdemalions of all nations, male and female, in possession of the side walks.

Seated on spar ends, listening, in the soft monotone of the sea, to stories of the Broomielaw, he had heard—Wisht! he had heard what he had heard. And now he was here, seeing it, drinking in the fact that there were shops, shops exhibiting costly instruments, flags, books, machinery; that it was a highway of respectability—where reputations could be made, not broken. . . . He stared again at the name. There was something awry with this Broomielaw. He searched his memory for indications.

He had heard of it first from a half-drunken sailor on the Maidan, an hoary sinner who announced to peering Bengalees that he owned houses on the Broomielaw—"pubs," he called them—"where a man might shwill all

day—hic—an' all night—hic—an' no dam' low caste nigger police would bother him." They were taking him to jail because obviously he was unclean. "Whiroo!" he challenged the guardians of Calcutta's peace to meet him in the Broomielaw, when he would be pleased to show them how many blue beans made five. It appeared that he was a sort of king in the Broomielaw, and O'Hagan drew near because, at first, he visualised a countryman in distress and because of the iteration of that strange word —the Broomielaw. And here he was, now, in the midst of it.

Glasgow lay all around him, and yet, but for the trickling quality of the rain which fell upon him he had found no sign he knew.

He had heard of the street preachers who stood on little rostrums—barrels the historians had termed them—to harangue busy citizens on the instability of their tenure, and to warn them of the perambulations of a very potent and alert devil, who waited with crutches to assist them . . . but he did not see these pessimists. Nor was there any sulphur in the air which could not be directly traced to adjacent chimneys.

Then there came the memory of haggis to bother him—it was early, you perceive, and he could not yet enter an office. All the streets of Glesca abounded in some way with haggis. He had a mental picture that a Scotsman could not live his day without it, and that when his rose was blown he found it in the skies. Yet here O'Hagan could discover no haggis. The disappointment troubled him. He felt as a man who opens a book which, as a child, held him enthralled, and finds it, not insipid, not rococo, not contemptible—but lacking in a certain quality which once had stirred him.

Big shops no longer could put a glamour on O'Hagan. City halls, sumptuous offices, electric cars, giant hotels, and all the marvels of modern life left him cold. He had seen them in New York, in Sydney, Melbourne, Cape Town even, as he had seen them in London. They belonged to the new era which men are so busy extolling; to the world of floating-palace-hotel things, with a swimming bath thrown in, which some folk still term ships; to the rush after wealth, the hammer and tongs struggle to reach affluence quickly; to the crowded and sorrowful tenements where all "those others" are penned.

But of haggis, the Broomielaw, preachers, and several other phantasies, including the mist which was rain, only the rain existed. And that was failing.

In an irresistible quiver of complaint O'Hagan dived to make quite sure there existed somewhere a Glesca similar to that of which he had been told in watches beneath the quiet tropic moon, in plains beyond the Hindu Kush, on the peak at Hong Kong—and presently he found it, not far distant, but very gaunt and hoary, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Dobbie's Loan.

The city clocks striking ten brought him post haste to the Broomielaw, which was his *point d'appui*, and there he found a telegraph office which would send a message over the wires to Lucy.

"All serene, dearest," he wrote with a pen which spluttered, "had a grand journey and now on way to ship. It is some distance. I shall find out where we can stay near. DEN."

Then after an interview with the ship-builders, he set off by tram and came to Clydebank.

The rain had ceased and the promised sun had appeared when O'Hagan stood on the dock wall looking down for the first time at the *Strathmuir*. Pride was in his glance. She was his to command, to take to sea, guide, nurse and direct, and she lay afloat with men swarming about her like bees about a hive. The steaming air shook with the clash of hammers, the pom-pom like tap-tap-tap, very fast, of the riveters; the steely click of ratchets. There were men on her bridge, on her stumpy masts, on her rigging, and there were men who painted and polished and scraped and cleaned, and men who smudged and made dirty whatever they touched. A gaunt regiment of workers all clad in the rust-coloured garment known as overalls, which lent a warm tinge to the blues and greys of the iron and ascending vapour. The sun was drying her and she steamed at every pore.

To give some of these people foothold, planks were slung over side; others there were which dangled in the form of a tripod high about the masts, others again which appeared to keep the funnel and all that mid-ship section which is the domain of a captain and his officers from tumbling like a pack of cards.

The *Strathmuir* at this first view was a riot of unknown forces to O'Hagan—complex, complex, like a vision of gigantic tussling. The energy displayed seemed inadequate to the result. Phenomenal! It appeared that someone must succumb in so vast an encounter. The mere shock of concussion was sufficient to produce disaster—and yet he knew that it would not be; that presently, a month hence, six months hence, the banging would cease, the decks would be dry and the *Strathmuir* would glide out to sea unstirred by the clamour through which she had come. Unstirred; but vigorous from the fight; strong because of it—a wild thing to be governed, carrying in her frame the characteristics of the North which had fashioned her. Oh! she was strong, virile, dependable—the very antithesis of that miserable Tramp which had undone him.

As he stood there watching, getting accustomed to the savagery and gross turmoil of construction, the question dawned—when can she be ready for sea?

He acknowledged at once that she was sturdy, that she exhibited the lines he loved, that she would do, as the saying goes—but he could not pierce her processes. It seemed that she could never be ready for sea—a year perhaps, six months; anything far off, tantalising and visionary. And as he stood puzzling this there came across the stage which joined her to the dock wall a man in brown overalls, wearing a cap carrying a dim revelation of badge and gold lace. He came near wiping his hands and saying as only an Aberdonian can—

"Ye'll be Captain O'Hagan?"

O'Hagan scanned and said that was true.

"They 'phoned me fra' the office you were on your way. It's a graund day," said the man of iron.

He paused, his eyes twinkling appreciation of the message notifying him of a captain's advent—"A dandy-like chap," it said, in the voice of the chief clerk, "clean shaven and with a fighting jaw—mind your eye, Angus. . . . Mind, also, he ca'd her a cargo-wallah. An' he wears gloves."

He made an end of polishing and held forth his right hand, introducing himself—as though that were necessary.

"Ma name," he said, "is Donald Angus. You may have haird tell o' me, an' I'm chief o' the *Strathmuir*."

O'Hagan had no doubt at all on this head. Donald Angus was of a type he had learned to know since his first day in steam. He could be no one other than the chief

engineer. He had the essential notches graven on him. He was strong. He had many inches. He was self-reliant, he wore a beard cut in the orthodox fashion, his eyes were blue and they twinkled in spite of the fact that he was a Scot and should be dour.

O'Hagan accepted his hand and they stood together comparing notes, testing the qualities which each imagined he perceived in the other. And for their medium, as is the way with sailors, they had recourse to ships, steamers, the ports of the world. O'Hagan presently mentioned the *Saladin*, in referring to his life in the Eastern Mail, and Angus broke in with—

"I saw her in Melbourne, nineteen hun'ard and one it was. . . ."

"I was third of her then," O'Hagan admitted.

"Were ye oot there when the *Kingussie* came in at the end of a towline after nigh on a thousand mile behind yon Shaw-Savill boat. . . . ?"

"No—but I heard of it. . . ."

"An' I was second of her," said Angus. "Took sick in Melbourne an' came ashore oot of her."

"I suppose you saw the rats were leaving her?" O'Hagan smiled.

"I saw enough to make me give her best . . . if you ask me," the Scotsman asserted, his voice low. "I saw where you could blow peas through her—doon betwixt wind an' water . . . she that had stood her survey only six months before an' was chalked A1 at Lloyd's. . . . It's these devilish freights that do for them when they're aged. The iron's just perished an' you clap a bellyfull in her of your worst an' send her where there's wider sea room than in any other part of the world. . . . Doon South, eh? Ou, aye . . . I know . . . I lairned aa' there was to lairn whiles we are paddlin' oot *Kingussie*. . . ."

"It isn't always age, though," O'Hagan interrupted. "It's class, strength, build. . . ."

Angus nodded, his eyes sparkling.

"Soon after I joined the Eastern Mail they sent me round to Belfast to take over a brand new ship which they had chartered for emigrants," said O'Hagan. "She was built for the West Indian trade, passengers and bananas, and they sent us round to Liverpool to fill up with cement and the devil—you know the sort of stuff I mean. . . ."

"Aye—do I," Angus hummed.

"Then they plastered her upper decks with washhouses and the rest, filled her matchboard, 'tween-deck cabins with nine hundred emigrants, and sent us off *viâ* Cape Town—to escape canal dues—on her road to Australia."

Angus whistled. "Lose anyone?" he asked with the casual intonation of a man interested in statistics.

"We came very nearly losing the ship," O'Hagan jerked out. "She opened out before we reached the Western Islands. She twisted plates and panelling before she got off the pitch of the Cape. Then we put her on the Great Circle for Melbourne, and off Kerguelen she turned round to ask for smoother water . . . so we dry-nursed her well up into the thirties without her top works, with washhouses, lavatories and companionways swept clear away, with panels working so that they would have ripped your fingers clean as any surgeon and no charge made. . . ."

"A new ship, you say?" Angus questioned as O'Hagan drew breath.

"First voyage."

"Built for the West Indian trade, ye say?"

"Passengers and bananas."

"Wha got the sack?" Angus questioned. "A chartered ship! Ou aye—someone's got to stand. . . ."

"The skipper and chief engineer got the sack," O'Hagan tossed back. "If it could have been suggested in any fashion that the navigating officer, purser or doctor had had a hand in her direction we should have got the sack as well. Made no mistake about that, Mr. Angus . . . and so it would be here, for you and me—if things feel agley."

"Hoots!" said the engineer, his eyes twinkling. "Let's get awa' in ta lunch—this is Clydebank, sir, an' it will take us all oor time—you an' me—ta start sae much as a rivet . . . put her on the Great Circle or whaur ye will."

CHAPTER VII

THE CHANCE

A WEEK later Lucy joined her husband in the apartments he had secured for her in Govan, and found him walking on air.

In spite of the heartening result of Captain Worsdale's telegram he had returned from his visit to town a little inclined to question the decision he had made. William Tipton and the rainbow funnel still presented a more possible mode of escape from the dead burden of failure he faced. McClure, the Head of the Pampas Line, was responsible for this. He had been so very solemn over it, so definite as to the result, should certain contingencies arise, that O'Hagan felt he would be unable to withstand them. " You would have to go, you see that, don't you," was the chord he had struck—and it vibrated even in Lucy's presence, her delighted comment notwithstanding.

It was the chord which had twanged for months—failure its burden. The solemn music of a dirge accompanying him wherever he moved. It had been apparent to Lucy even when he was recounting, over his hurried packing, the desirability of being in a firm like McClures ; the opportunities he would find, " if only it lasts." He went no farther than this in words. It seemed unnecessary. Yet it hummed through all his comment, like the *leit-motif* of a character in opera.

But now, as Lucy met him at the Central Station, no hint of trouble remained. He had forgotten his insecurity of tenure, the baneful effect of a Black List and the guessed-at hostility of Sharum, Fit & Co. ; or, if he remembered, he dissembled bravely. Lucy decided he had forgotten and her heart leaped in thankfulness. To see his fine face tortured by anxiety and doubt was terrible to his wife ; to notice quick flashes of temper and the rather caustic comment which sometimes arrived was pain unspeakable —and it would grow. To know that she and Baba must add to his burden and in no sense could aid him was the

last sorrow. It kept her awake when sleep was essential. It would make her old, even as it would fashion in him some other soul, some strange being who had crept into her arms in the guise of him she loved.

And now she perceived he walked on air. His head was lifted, his step elastic, his eyes brimmed with hope. He took Baba in his arms and imprinted cautiously a kiss on the wondering lips. He submitted gravely to being punched by twin restless fists. He found the child had grown both in weight and intelligence—which may have been true and set Lucy quivering. He threw out a sentence in Urdu and accepted the gurgle he gave him as wisdom. He was jubilant now, jubilant with the day's exit—because to-night he could talk with Lucy and tell her of success.

He had prayed as a man does for success and it had eluded him; passed over mocking to that soul who contended with him, leaving him wrung. He had caught at its bridle and striven to mount, but he had failed. Ignominiously sometimes, out of sheer apathy at others. Until Worsdale stepped aside to help him he was like a runner clinging to the stirrup. Exhausted, dust-covered, spattered, too weary to consider the fact that a child existed . . . so he hurried from pillar to post, seeking to win bread.

But now was another tune. The child reclined in his arms to cut the air with sawing fists; to mouth and dribble and crow at him—that small and amazingly cute personage which had got himself born to the house of O'Hagan without consulting either the stars or some Olympian versed in prophecy.

A man who is on the Black List, whose father was simply a poor parson, had no right with a child. A woman whose father had risen no higher in the army than Lucy's, who had got himself killed in a frontier row before he had been able to prepare a *dot* for his daughter, had no right to consider the beautiful sorrows of maternity. And a child born of parents so wanting in practicality should, in these days, have returned to the dark whence he came. The world of men was singularly bare of comfort for the Bottle-Filler who was his father. It would look without emotion on any struggles he might be compelled to endure. It would shrug shoulders over his lapses, speak—if it considered him at all—in the slick phrases of condemnation

which are its method ; then turn aside to run with bowls of soup and offers of sustenance to those known as the horny-handed sons of toil. A people these, who alone can produce children without taking thought for the morrow ; a people. in other words, definitely banded together to extort from us that which our fathers omitted to place to their fathers' credit.

The days passed in a dream. Glasgow perhaps had cast its spell upon these two ; perhaps the Clyde with its wonderful steamers which carried them now through the Kyles of Bute, now to Arran, and once, on a memorable day, by steamer and coach through Hell's Glen, which lies at the foot of Ben Donich, and thence across the loch to Inverary.

For a man so lately emerged from the hands of those whose province it is to sit on sofas until debts, just and unjust, be paid, this was sheer coquetting with Fate. But on the morning of the day which saw them looking up the loch from Inverary, a letter had arrived from an agent in Riverton which informed O'Hagan in precise words that he had a client who was prepared to take the Deodars furnished for twelve months. The rent he offered was one and a half guineas weekly and he stipulated for an immediate reply. To this O'Hagan wired, " I accept," then, like two children who have cast away a burden, they started alone for their picnic.

The sun smiled, you perceive, and the lochs would be wonderful. They were triumphant at this "unforeseen piece of luck," as Denis called it. The landlady's daughter, too, made her contribution. She had discovered a fine enthusiasm for the " wee bairn," and begged to be allowed to take entire charge of it. So they started without fear and returned shorn of many shillings but with hearts attuned to that song which came daily with more assurance from O'Hagan's strong bass. Success ! Success !— at last, at last success !

It was a reckless expenditure of those slowly earned bawbees, of course ; but they were at that stage of ecstasy with life and each other which seemed to demand outlay. At this moment, had Denis found himself the owner of an unexpected ten pound note, he would have taken Lucy by the arm straight, straight to Glasgow's most wonderful emporium and there spent it on a coat which

should keep her warm. True it was summer as yet, but love does not recognise seasons, and for months he had been praying for that note.

Denis talked of the coat to-day for the first time at Inverary. Hitherto he had not dared. He argued that she plainly needed it—had needed it all last winter. He urged that the soft, dark, seal coney on which he had set his heart would tone so well with her beautiful colouring. He seemed, so he said in her ear, to find his future more assured now that he had been taken up by McClure. Twenty-five pounds a month meant three hundred a year. There remained also their joint " unearned increment "—and now over and above all of it was this eighty-odd pounds for their house. " We will go and see about it to-morrow," he decided, staring at the beautiful contours far up the loch, his arm linked in Lucy's.

It was recoil, revulsion, of course. From a state of absolute dependence they had blossomed to a moderate ease which plucked at O'Hagan's purse strings even as it plucked at his heart. At last ! At last ! he seemed to be saying in a pæan of triumph . . . as though in all verity he saw himself free ; as though no Black List existed to torture him and render him effete.

Had not Lucy stood very firm on the slopes by Inverary, Den would have " blewed that tenner " before it arrived, before he knew, indeed, whether he were to take the *Strathmuir* to sea or not—and if things afterwards had fallen awry he would have consoled himself with the reflection that, at all events, Lucy had her coat.

But Lucy decided that the fashion of fur coats would be altered next winter. And Den accepted that in all faith.

So the days passed, each of them proving more heartening than the last ; enthralling days which saw the *Strathmuir* slowly growing fit, and the fascination of a great yard taking surer hold. On Sunday afternoons Lucy accompanied him to the works and walked sparkling amidst the joists and struts and beams. They sought Den's room and brought to it purchases they made, and questioned, throbbing, whether they would be together this voyage or whether Den would sail alone. All sorts of theories jostled in their minds. Worsdale had advised O'Hagan to say nothing about it, to leave it in his hands and he would see what he could do. Incidentally he

managed to convey the fact that he considered them mad to think of taking so young a child to sea . . . but his letter showed encouragement. That was everything.

Twice McClure paid a sudden visit to the ship and on the second expressed himself satisfied with all O'Hagan had done. He made no allusion either to the Black List or to Sharum's, and departed after throwing out a phrase which O'Hagan could construe in but one way.

"I should advise you to see to the ventilation of your room," he said in his crisp fashion. "It appears to me they have overlooked it."

Now "your room" might mean anything; yet Denis arrived that evening in Lucy's presence with a hug which was thoroughly convincing and boyish.

"My luck will hold!" he chanted. "Another month, oh Mem-sahib, and I shall have my papers back. Another month! Ye gods!" and then, as though the mention of time brought home his position, he suddenly paused and said in a new voice, the voice Lucy had heard during those months at Riverton—"I wonder whether the beggars will endorse it as they do a cabby's licence? . . . 'Suspended' would rather botch one—if it were stuck across its face, eh?"

"They wouldn't dare," Lucy flamed, her heart racing swiftly in response.

"I am not sure about that," he answered and leaned back, his dinner forgotten.

Lucy crossed and sat in his lap, compelling him to make place for her.

"Forget it, Den . . . it does not matter. Mr. McClure knows you have been suspended—forget . . . forget . . . forget." She kissed his forehead.

He could not resist that touch. He kissed her eyes. She ran her fingers through his hair. He was serious for perhaps five minutes, then came the laugh she loved and she left him to his dinner.

He looked across at her to emphasise McClure's phrase —"'Your room,' he said, 'Your room, Captain O'Hagan.' . . . Do you think he would have said that if he did not mean I was to go?"

"No," said Lucy.

"Nor do I." Then again he paused and added—"Oh, I wonder—I wonder. . . . Faith! I don't—I believe, Mem-sahib—I believe, and so do you."

Then, very naturally, Lucy said—" Yes."

O'Hagan at this time was slowly finding his feet; a fact Lucy knew far better than did her husband. She knew the strange and fascinating race from which he was sprung; its brilliancy, its dash and wit, its twin gifts of eloquence and generosity. She knew, too, its red-hot enthusiasms and its cold contempt of a life which stings; the brooding and still dreaminess which sapped its manhood and set it behind when it was essential it should be up and doing.

She knew these things as one must who has lived in garrison towns among soldiers and has known them on The Curragh as well as at Colchester, the Plains and Simla and Gib. And now she saw that Den came home with nearly the same *verve* after a long day in a noisy yard as he had shown at breakfast. He had stories to tell her once more. Stories of his experiences—mainly wrapped about a personage who, presently, Lucy would learn to know quite well—" My chief engineer, Angus, you remember," and the girl found them interesting because she loved the teller. She found herself again entering into his life, taking her share in the ups and downs, precisely as at the beginning.

That gave her hope. She sought his eyes at all junctures now. She saw them brighten by degrees. She found them glowing with pride and importance as he came in for a hurried lunch. " I mustn't be a minute to-day, dearest. They are lifting a big weight, and I want to be there," came to be a phrase which meant shortening their minutes together. Sometimes it was—" They are taking a turn out of her this afternoon, and I want to get back." It sounded as though the ship were a piece of string which had become entangled; but Lucy presently learned that he meant they were going to move the engines. She became wonderfully alive to the meaning of his technicalities. She took a pride in his Lordship of the mute *Strathmuir* and appreciated the terse phrases concerning her precisely as she had acquired, in days long past, the use and meaning of Army orders.

You see, although O'Hagan had never shown any churlishness during those long days before the trial nor in the more terrible period since, Lucy had discovered that he was less ready to laugh, more ready to sit and brood. She hated brooding. It frightened her. She

dared not consider what would happen if Den became morose. One can never tell where brooding will lead. She feared it with her whole, brave heart—as a woman will who has not yet seen cause to relinquish her ideals.

Then came a night when Angus arrived after dinner carrying a newspaper—an evening edition which O'Hagan had not seen.

"I thought ye would like to see it. Mrs. O'Hagan"—he bowed towards Lucy—"will complain that I give ye no peace—an' wi' a sairtain truth, too. But this consairns yon tug-boat we were talkin' aboot a few days ago, an' I believe ye'll forgie me for troublin' ye. . . ."

He opened the paper and folded over a paragraph which occupied the lower half of a column.

"You mean the *Casa Blanca?*" O'Hagan questioned, a stern note already in evidence.

"Not our tug, Mr. Angus," Lucy joined in. "Oh! please don't tell us something has happened to——"

"Henry Tompson," O'Hagan put in with a quick look at his wife.

"A breakdown," Angus explained at once. "Naething more serious. . . . Hoots! if she had come to hairm I would scarcely be daunderin' in ta see ye wi' a pipe in ma gills . . . nay—nay—but she's weenged f'r aa that. Weenged—an' it wull take her more than twenty-four hoors to get in fettle—if yon's true."

"Yon" was the account over which O'Hagan bent.

"Read it," Lucy suggested.

And Den, having already scanned it for horrors, decided that he might.

"'According to a cable from Lloyd's agents at Vigo'—that's just round the corner in Spain, Loo," he explained—"'the captain of the *Casa Blanca*, which put in here this afternoon, had a narrow escape from drowning. It will be remembered that the *Casa Blanca* is being sent by her builders, in charge of Captain Tompson, to Valparaiso; and a certain amount of interest is taken in the rather unusual trip, because of the small size of the vessel which has undertaken one of the longest and most stormy voyages possible on this round and singularly turbulent world of ours.

"'Of course Captain Tompson is not tied to time. He dodges from port to port along the coast, and if he finds

it necessary puts in for shelter, provisions, water, coal, and so forth. But after leaving Corunna it seems the weather became suddenly bad, and when off Cape Finisterre the little craft shipped a sea which swept her decks, carrying away bridge, deck house and funnel. The captain was tossed overboard with the rest of the wreckage, but by great good luck he secured hold of a plank and was pulled on board none the worse for his immersion.

" ' We understand on inquiry of the builders that orders have been despatched to proceed at once with repairs, and it is hoped that in a fortnight or so the small vessel will be able to resume her plucky attempt to reach South America before the equinoctials set in. . . .' "

O'Hagan looked up at Lucy, his lips in line.

" I should never forgive myself if anything happened to them," he said softly.

" Pairsonally," said Angus without hesitation, " I consider it just temptin' Provedence to go a trip like that—either on deck or in her engine-room."

" It's Hobson's choice for the poor devils who go, as a rule," O'Hagan reminded.

" Aye ? " Angus mouthed, his eyes lifted.

" You see, he had been suspended," came quietly to enlighten him.

" That makes a differ. . . . Ou aye, I can understan' a man takin' a hand in such like cases ; but in no ither, bar "—he puffed it out with definite contempt—" bar he's wowf."

Lucy looked across reiterating the strange word and he explained smiling—

" Daft—crazy, you would ca' it, but from what the cap'en says, I gather the man was driven. . . ."

" Exactly. Driven by hunger."

" It's a job for a single man," Angus proclaimed, " or a man wha's tired o' life . . . I know ! They coaxed me into takin' charge o' the stairn half o' that linked foolishness they ca'd *Stromsöe II.*," he rambled on, intent on forcing a new interest. " You mind her ? " he inquired. " A tank boat which was tae be towed to and from the oil ports by anither tanker ca'd *Stromsöe I.*—because, you mind, it will pay better to sail twa *Stromsöes*, wi' one expenditure o' fuel, than one. . . . Oh ! I know—I know ! "

He seized the paper, tore it into two sections and bunched each into a small elongated roll. " That's

Stromsöe I.," he announced, placing it on the table. " She's a full-power, ocean-going oil freighter, wi' engines aft an' a sheer o' deck in front like a turtle back. A bit mast up for'ad, anither aft to carry the lights, a plank bridge amidships . . . an' here's *Stromsöe II.*, connect wi' a string to her sister, daunderin' along a cable's length astairn, wi' no means of propulsion, twa stumpy masts an' a place aft to steer. . . . Her decks were turtle-backed too, awfu' to consider, an' my job—the first I had at sea, ye'll mind—was to keep her donkey boiler for emergency. That means heavin' in the towline an' sic like foolery . . . an' ye'll understan' I had fine opportunities for keepin' a fu' head o' steam. . . .

" We were five hundred miles west o' Fastnet," said Angus as he sat back and pointed with a pipe stem at the models, " more or less. The night shut down early an' we twa dafties are headin', light mind, into a green-like bank o' cloud standin' like a shutter across the sun. *Stromsöe I.* signalled us before dark, ' Mind your eye, *Stromsöe II.*, an' keep a good length hawser the night.' We said ' Aye, aye—go gingerly wi' us through that scarp ! ' and in truth it looked it. . . .

" Then came night and a blinkin' bit light was all we had ta tell us jus' whaur *Stromsöe I.* led. . . .

" At ten o'clock," said Angus as he gave the models a twitch which left them out of line, " we hit that bank straight in the eye, an' it turned on us just for all the world as though we'd angered it. Whiles blue flame flickered on the edge an' there came the rumble of thunder ; whiles again there was no sound and the night was black like a drain. . . . The wind swept oot o' naethingness, hungry, wi' a snap in it that set us dodderin.' It came at us savage from a sweep across the ice in Baffin's Bay . . . an' the sea got up to help it ; a sea—an' me new to the game—that took my breath in smacks. . . . Lumps, Mrs. O'Hagan, lumps o' movin' water, slopin' up to the stars, sleekin' awa wi' a suck an' a slubber o' foam. . . . Hills . . . ou aye, ye've travelled an' have seen . . . but I wass lookin' now for the first time—an' it took my breath. It took my breath. . . ."

He leaned forward tapping the table before him.

" Three o'clock came along an' wi' it a waste o' water that made us jus' stand steel," said he. " Somethin' twanged on the bow. We could not see what—but we

saw her nose rise like a wedge across a reeft in the clouds an' then she daundered away on her own. . . . I was busy wi' the boiler an' the bearings which were warm, an' did not see just what happened—but the roll she gave as she fell off in the trough waked me to some sort o' notion o' ma sins. . . .

"I thought she was gone. I thought I had done for good an' aa wi' winches, boilers, thrusts an' aa the clamjamphrie of an engine room. I thought, ye understan', I might begin an' say those prayers I had promiset to say an' had forgotten . . . an' I began tae wunner what like place it was we would fetch doon there beyond they bashin' hill-set rollers wha'd torn us by the croop an' flung us dodderin'. . . . Then up comes oor skeeper—ae boy he wass in years—an' sets the signal gaein'. . . . 'Dot, dot, dash,' he jabbers oot in Morse, 'we are adreeft—stan' by tae pick us up,' or some sich message; but deil the *Stromsöe I.*, did we see the nicht . . . or the day which followed . . . or the day which followed that—deil the sight of anything at aa under steam did we see for a week. . . . We just lay an' grumphed at ae thing oor skeeper ca'd a sea-anchor until ae liner happened on us an' walked us back tae Queenstoon. . . ."

Angus leaned forward to collect his models. He bunched them together and stuffed his side pocket.

"I did that when I was a bit lad," said he, "an' I'd like tae do it again—if I knew I would come oot the same way. . . ."

O'Hagan laughed and said to Lucy—

"He means he came in for something in the salvage line . . . eh, Angus?"

"Aye, did I. . . ." he smiled broadly. "My share o' that week's wark was roond aboot two hun'ard pounds . . . an' I've been lookin' for chances ever since. . . ."

"None in the *Strathmuir*, anyway," O'Hagan decided.

"Wi' Cap'en O'Hagan in command, I'm sure," the engineer bowed, then with a chuckle which set the others laughing, he added—

"Eigh! but we were a bonny pair—for an underwriter's reesk. Likely the premium was worth holdin' too . . . for *Stromsöe I.* wass a ceelinder wi' engines in her stairn, while *Stromsöe II.* was a ceelinder wi' none! I give ye my word I meant that trip tae be ma last—

whiles I was on it—ma verra last . . . an' yet they caught me in *Kingussie* doon south where there's no lane o' steamships passin' tae look ye up an' speir how ye fare. . . ."

O'Hagan withdrew his pipe and questioned—" Any loot attached to the *Kingussie?* "

Angus shrugged over this. " We airned it . . . every bawbee," he said with decision, " an' so did yon Shaw-Savill boat. But there was no taste to what we catchit . . . it seems," he added, twinkling as he rose to go, " *Kingussie* sailed wi' a writ of attachment on her which no man, bar oor skeeper, had seen. . . . I wonder," he questioned dryly, " havin' regard to the fact that he missed his share o' the plunder just by that, whether he would be ready tae act in the same way ta-morrow? "

He tapped his nose very gently over this. " It wants thinkin' oot, yon," he said enigmatically. " Ou aye! It wants conseederation."

. . . .

There came a letter about a week later from Jimmy Barlow himself, asking O'Hagan for the sake of old times to " see the missis " and explain the circumstances which had compelled him to put into Vigo. He explained that he had seen reports in the Spanish papers, " which fairly took the cake for exaggeration." He was afraid, too, that " some of those newspaper chaps would be laying it on thick," and he " didn't want his wife scared out of her soul-case." There was nothing in fact to scare a cat. The *Casa Blanca* was a clever little teetotum and a fine seaboat, but he got caught by weather which he could only call " foxy."

Then came his fear that he wouldn't get away " for a month o' Sundays," and a question asking whether Captain O'Hagan had had any luck.

It was a breezy enough epistle, but it showed Jimmy Barlow in a Mark Tapley frame of mind for the benefit of his old commander which was scarcely convincing. O'Hagan pulled wry faces over it as he sat discussing with Lucy its optimism.

" If they give me command of the *Strathmuir*," he said, " and we get away up to time; we ought to come across each other before we reach the Plate."

" Is that possible? " Lucy questioned, her hands linked round his arm.

"Faith! I have known stranger meetings at sea."

"Delightful!"

"I'll write and tell him just when we shall sail and get his itinerary . . . then, if he works it properly we could nurse him a bit. We go over nearly the same ground," O'Hagan decided, noting Lucy's interest. "By Jove! Yes—I'll do it at once."

So he sat down and concocted a letter to Jimmy Barlow giving him full particulars of the *Strathmuir's* coming voyage, the track he would take, and the signal stations he would try to speak. By this means, without in any way interfering with his owner's interests, he might be able to convoy the *Casa Blanca* across that sixteen hundred mile stretch of ocean which lies between Las Palmas and Pernambuco.

He wrote also to Mrs. Jimmy, explaining why he could not come to see her as her husband desired, and advised her to take as little heed as possible of what the papers said; and then sat down to wait, to wonder whether he had built too certainly on obtaining command. Whether, indeed, by any possibility he would be able to act as he had proposed.

And so it continued until they were within a few days of the *Strathmuir's* trials.

Then one morning a letter reached O'Hagan bearing the sign manual of the Board of Trade. He tore the envelope methodically enough, and withdrew his certificate without a word. But as he unfolded the parchment Lucy saw that he flushed—a sorrowful signal had she awaited it, to the stress he felt. She scarcely heeded the assurance he tossed her, his laugh was so stifled——

"Good. It's my ticket—and they haven't marked it . . . By Jove! If they had I don't think I should have dared use it . . . even if folks would have looked at it.'

"I was sure they wouldn't," Lucy breathed. "Yet I am thankful to know it."

"So am I. Lord! I have had the jumps for a week thinking of it. . . ."

"More than that, Den."

"Mavourneen!" He looked up quizzically and caught her glance. "I believe," he said slowly, "you've been afther watching me."

"Praying for you, oh dearest," said Lucy, and her arms went up about his neck as he drew her close. "Show

me," she whispered. "Let me see it. I don't believe I've ever seen it."

So he showed her the rustling parchment with its acknowledgment of the honours he had taken only after years of hardship and preparation.

"I fought to get that," he said simply, "and when I had it, it gave me about ninety pounds a year. Fine, eh? Cost me and the dear old gov'nor seven or eight hundred pounds, by Jove. . . . Took top rank too, see? There it stands—'Extra Master,' 'Passed in Steam,' 'Passed new Sight Test,' 'Morse'—everything, by the Lord! Oh! I'm like the bumboat wallah in Bombay—'Ebreyting got, oh Mem-sahib, monkey no got.' . . . No ship apparently in the world for me, old girl—eh, what?"

"You have the *Strathmuir*, Den."

"On probation," he sang in her ear. "Wait a bit! I'll dish 'em. If I don't get her after all I shall know why. I'll work a scheme I've been thinking out. We'll make some pennies or I'll——"

"You will have the *Strathmuir*, Den . . . you will sail in her and it is I who will have to stay behind and wait. I shall hate that," she whispered, clinging.

He held her close. "Then I shall chuck it," he decided.

"No—no. You mustn't, Den. It is your chance and you must take it. We will get along as well as we can without you. . . . Promise."

He recognised the futility of argument with a shrug—"I believe you are right," he answered. "I'll have to stick it, if they put me in. Eigh! but I wish they would decide. I'm getting desperate, Loo. It's the rustle of this 'ticket' thing that does it. It cost me so much . . . and the poor old dad too, who couldn't afford it. Faith! I was never off his hands until he pegged out—never, as I'm a living soul. If I'd been trained for a barrister I might have expected that sort of thing. That's the curse of sea-going. There's no money in it—nowhere to climb, even if you are lucky; while if you are unlucky you come a cropper anyhow. . . ."

Lucy checked him with kisses. "I prophesy you are going in the *Strathmuir*, oh dearest," she told him.

"You are my cheery darling," he answered, surrendering to her mood.

And as it happened, because mainly of the friendship

shown by Captain Worsdale, there came one morning a note from the head of the Pampas Line, appointing O'Hagan to the ship and requesting him to make all preparations for the trials which were to take place on the following Monday.

Then, on Sunday, the day before O'Hagan expected him, McClure came down to Clydebank while Lucy and her husband were triumphantly putting final touches to their cabin.

Mrs. O'Hagan was the first to scent the presence of a stranger. It wasn't Angus, she decided, listening; nor any of the men she had seen, she continued, peeping through a port which gave upon the deck. "He isn't a sailor at all," she concluded, "but he seems to be coming here. Look out, oh dearest!"

O'Hagan looked and sprang back with lifted finger. "It's McClure," he whispered. "Good gracious—what shall we do?"

"See him, dearest," cooed Mrs. O'Hagan. "Make love to him and send him away quite happy."

O'Hagan had nothing to say. He saw the great man coming briskly aft, saw him enter the alleyway, and then straightway darted to intercept him.

Of course he was too late.

"I came down last night," said McClure, as they met, "because I did not much relish the Sunday travelling. As it is fine I thought I should be able to go over the ship—er—by the way"—he was in the saloon now—"did you draw their attention to the ventilation of your room?" He approached the door, O'Hagan beside him. "May I see it?" Then as he came near he caught sight of Lucy standing there looking out of an open port.

He halted at once and uncovered. "I beg your pardon," he said, as she turned round. "I did not gather . . ."

"I am afraid it was my fault, sir," O'Hagan put in, flushed and amused. "I should have told you. . . . Lucy, let me present Mr. McClure."

The owner bowed and Lucy made him instantly welcome.

In a general way, it should be said, McClure had no knowledge of the sex which compels captains and officers to beg for leave and is considered in the light of an encumbrance by those who rule the various services. No doubt there were women, wives, sweethearts, and so forth, in the background, but, as a rule, McClure, in common with other

great shipowners, was not likely to come in contact with them. To be friendly with one's skippers, as once had been essential, was sufficiently terrible. *Autre temps, autre mœurs.* To-day one simply did not do it.

But McClure, if he was not prepared to encourage the old relationship, was what is termed a gentleman and quite competent to recognise what also is termed a lady, when he met her. This girl won her way in the first exchange. She was bright. She was equipped with the essential manner, and in a few minutes McClure was chatting with a geniality O'Hagan had never yet seen him display. He seemed indeed to enter quite into the spirit of the thing.

"I was afraid," he said presently, "that you would consider me a nuisance, coming to worry you on Sunday of all days; but you very kindly show that I am welcome. May we sit? I have had a dusty walk. . . . Thanks so much. This is a capital room," his glance took it in. "You must permit me to recognise your finger in the details I see." His eyes were everywhere, yet he contrived to discover that Mrs. O'Hagan was exceedingly pretty, and a pucker of consideration touched his forehead as they chatted.

He discovered in a very short time that Lucy had been in India and had travelled rather widely for so young a woman. This interested him, and he drew her out with those leading questions a man of culture can so readily and inoffensively propound. Lucy's life history was no longer a sealed book. "The army," McClure decided. "Quite. You cannot mistake the note," and as they chatted he formed his opinion—one entirely sympathetic but unspoken.

Then for a while the two men marched solemnly about the decks and bridge, peeped into the living rooms and examined new points in the game of shipbuilding. A workmanlike ship lay for examination. No giltwork, no scrolls, no unnecessary elaboration, but, on the other hand, no gingerbread—at all events evident. Labour-saving appliances, oh yes—for that is essential where labour stands on stilts and frowns and quibbles with capital. But again nothing which had not been forced by the insensate competition of rivals at home and abroad, and the unending interferences of an authority which is as greatly concerned with "belts and sashes" as a kindred department which prepares the nation against war.

They came back after a long inspection and found Lucy with her travelling tea basket, her dainty china, and tea already in the pot. McClure smiled his approval. He said that he had no idea of the hour, but that he would have discovered it long before he could reach his hotel. Very gratefully he would take a cup. Then standing thoughtfully before the pretty picture Lucy made, he said :

" Are you one of those fortunate people, Mrs. O'Hagan, who are called 'good sailors' ? "

She looked up to say she had never been ill in her life.

" And do you happen to be fond of the sea ? "

" I love it," said Lucy, her heart throbbing, her face aflame at the direction he took.

McClure lifted his cup and noted its transparency—

" Have you ever been to the Argentine—B.A.* I wonder ? " he asked her.

" No."

" And you would care to ? "

Again came the quick phrase which is on the lips of all young people—" I should love it," then suddenly she paused and for some reason interjected, " but——" and was silent.

McClure drank his tea and replaced the cup.

He crossed the room, found his hat and stick, and quietly returned. Lucy wondered whether he had heard her reply. Her heart thumped furiously. McClure stood before her holding out his hand. She took it and heard him say—

" Think it out, Mrs. O'Hagan. She is only a tramp, you know ; but if your husband considers she is fit—and you would like the trip—go by all means. . . ."

He shook hands. He was rigorously polite. His tones seemed a little more formal ; as they had been before he took tea. Perhaps that was because he had read what was in Lucy's mind, and glowing in her eyes.

She said with a delight he certainly recognised—

" Oh ! but I don't need to think. . . . I may go, mayn't I ? I have been praying—praying to go . . . and —Den, please tell Mr. McClure what it means to us . . . for I can't, I can't——"

On the whole one is inclined to believe that McClure required no telling.

* Buenos Ayres.

CHAPTER VIII

HEADING SOUTH

The *Strathmuir* dug with her nose at a Channel roller which came meandering to greet her as she rounded the South Stack; but to the next and the next, all through a bewildering sequence of them, she lifted as became a ship thus early introduced to a sea.

As a matter of fact it was the first she had seen, for her trials and the trip round to Liverpool had taken place in brilliant summer weather. Angus, the chief engineer, standing hot and smudged to cool in the alleyway, said she did not seem to know what to do with it, adding, as an afterthought, "but she'll lairn." Mrs. O'Hagan, watching from behind a screen spread for her comfort on the deck above him, decided it was the *Strathmuir's* christening, and snapshotted the curving spray for a record.

It was summer still in British seas, the depth of winter down there where the *Casa Blanca* proposed presently to journey. Long days in the north, short, bitter days off the Horn and in Magellan's Straits, which Jimmy Barlow must pass. At the moment, it is true, he still moved from port to port, dodging Pompey on his way to a new world, and gaining experience of the *Casa Blanca's* moods.

In this matter the two officers of the *Sphinx*, who had to clear their characters, were in like case; but in no other under the sun. O'Hagan went out to win fame in command of one of Glasgow's best. Jimmy Barlow pottered along in singularly good hands, but on a freak voyage, his eye alert for portents, his mind intent on winning through. Coasting, especially in a tiny vessel which must be protected from too near an acquaintance with Atlantic or any other rollers, is a harassing business even where many men are engaged; but the *Casa Blanca* was unfitted to carry a large crew. A trip such as that upon which Jimmy Barlow was engaged is very like the freak trips sometimes attempted by acrobatic souls in

open boats on the Atlantic. You may arrive at your journey's end and you may arrive elsewhere.

But in this case it was not notoriety Jimmy Barlow struggled to secure—bread was the desideratum; the essential supply of bread for himself, a wife and three children, who had already stood very near the Reaper as he moved across the land.

At the moment the *Casa Blanca* pushed her way towards Agadir, the townlet of Morocco which presently was to thrill the Chancelleries of Europe and cause nations to loose their swords. But at the moment Agadir lay still enough beneath the African sun, and the stress of seas alone hindered Jimmy Barlow. He had touched at Mazagan and sheltered three blustery days at Mogador, whence a message, the last O'Hagan was to read, came to the underwriter's room on 'Change. "All well," it said.

Nothing could be briefer.

And here, through the glowing sunset of the north, came the *Strathmuir*, deeply laden with British cement, iron and machinery; but walking with a surer stride, the stride of a ship which, in spite of her burden under the new rule, accepts the sea for what it is,—a vessel which a man can control—one fit to contend with the force which presently would stand over her.

Out of the black north she came through the flare of a summer's gale, the sky above her blended for wickedness, the sea leaping already to greet her. It was the small, bustling, noisy sea of all narrow and shoal waters—the sea which gets up quickly, dies quickly, and is the antithesis of the vast ranges which travel the world round down there where the *Casa Blanca* presently must essay a passage.

Darkness descended with the slow precision of the fifties as the *Strathmuir* moved on in a growing whiteness. The lights came out to give her their blessing—Carnarvon Bay, Bardsey, Cardigan, and at length Tuskar. The *Strathmuir's* compasses had stood the test, even as O'Hagan's navigation had proved him competent. No slipshod searching for lights, nothing to flurry men on the bridge—men new not only to O'Hagan and the ship but to each other.

Red then white, red then white, Tuskar, the last of our Channel lights on this side, flashed upon a *Strathmuir* which presently would open the Irish land and meet all

there was in the way of weather. Ireland lay behind it. Wexford not far off, County Kildare, the home of O'Hagan's people in the long ago, just over the way. A whiff of the land came out to greet him as he passed, and for a moment he stood bareheaded, staring into the haze.

The wind swept moaning over his country's hills. He took deep breaths and returned to his corner.

Slosh, bang—boom. Boom again in diapason. A flicker of flying spray; decks whiter, the glare of sidelights now green, now red, reflected in rainbow tints on either hand. Slosh—bang—boom. An immense incursion of water trailing down steep decks, the hiss of spray on the fiddley gratings. The banging of an iron door down there where Angus had stood to judge her style.

The ship had scooped a deckload. Nothing more.

It was nearly one o'clock when Lucy woke to the noise of gurgling water and peeped out. The cabin was full of shadows. A small light burning on the farther bulkhead threw a circle of white upon the upper deck, which was the ceiling of her room. The wind moaned up there where the gurgling culminated in sudden rushes of water, as in a tilted bath. Footsteps crossed overhead at a run, sodden, thumping, like indiarubber. She found it necessary to discover why, and rose for the first time in her life afraid. There was a solemn flapping too, a flapping which seemed to shake the ship, which engaged her attention by the mere burden of iteration.

She slipped to the floor intent on discovering Baba's attitude amidst this turmoil. She moved in semi-darkness, afraid to strike a match, and reached the gimbal-slung cot which Den had discovered and purchased for her peace. The child slept without whimpering, one small, tightly clenched fist thrust out upon the rail. Lucy captured it and, cooing, placed it beneath the blankets.

She was but lightly clad, and the wind sang a lullaby high over head. It was the refrain she remembered once when crossing to India in the SW. monsoon, the refrain she had heard that night when Den's ship found the rocks of Cornwall.

She decided to turn up the lamp and crossed to do so. Then suddenly the ship stooped with a soughing note which sent fear for her child surging through her. She crouched by the crib side listening. The deck sloped away

from her feet. It rose to meet her. It trembled under the weight of repeated blows, solemn, booming drum notes, which reminded her of the bazaars, but were intensified, monstrous to consider. She listened in a sort of panic, but reached the lamp and turned it up.

That revealed to her a floor upon which everything moved, sometimes to port, sometimes to starboard, Den's hat box, a round, leather case this, rumbling with method; an armchair, which should have been fastened, waltzing skittishly; boots, a cake or two of soap flung from the washstand, books and trifles which are essential for a woman's comfort, all in arms, marching, doubling, charging to add to the turmoil which was outside.

Lucy seized these things and tucked them away. She was concerned with the hubbub which did not cease, with the charging water, the thudding drum notes which should have waked Baba, but did not. She put on more clothes, dressing in curious attitudes, sometimes clinging to the settee, sometimes sitting upon the deck, her feet outstretched to keep her from sliding, tobogganing down the slopes. She watched that swinging cot as she laboured with her dressing, and presently, with a cloak about her, entered the saloon. A dim light made it ghostly. Trays and other strange fixtures swayed solemnly in the gloom. A coat hanging there pictured instantly a headless and satanic personage, grotesquely making antics with limbs which showed no extremities.

She fled down the alleyway and came to the outer door. It was shut and the wind drummed heavily upon it. Then a great sea charged it and the water climbed, gurgling over the high sill and the alleyway brimmed.

She ran back quickly and found a companion way. She mounted the stairs clinging to the handrail, listening to the boom of the wind past the open door. She looked out. Darkness everywhere, darkness and flying spray. She strove to shield her eyes and stare over the drawn cowl; but she could not face the stinging salt. She turned her head and looked out with her back to the wind, and saw without knowing it, the meaning of all this additional turmoil.

A giant steamer fled by going up channel. Her decks were lighted, tier above tier. Four great funnels stood high above them belching smoke and a ruddy glow. She seemed to breathe fire and smoke like a monster in panto-

mime, and the roar of her engines and her passage sounded like the blast of a furnace. Enormous, she towered above that puny *Strathmuir*, scarcely deigning to note her existence, pushing her over towards the land as though the sea and the lights of England existed solely for her benefit.

Never in all her journeying had Lucy felt so small, or, in all truth, so frightened. She recognised that flying mail ship for one of the vessels on which she had voyaged without much thought; as of the *Saladin*, for instance, which moved so serenely with flowers and ferns on her tables and rarely felt the sea in her face. She recognised in those few minutes of panic that she would be alone in this ship; that Den would generally be on the bridge, and that only two officers, a steward and a maid slept at that end of the ship.

Then suddenly she remembered that Den had fitted a telephone from the bridge to her room and that she could perhaps make him hear. She could not face that swirling sea alone, and she dared not leave the child, even had she dared the sea.

She came back in a great hurry and found the child at rest. She breathed her thanks and reached the telephone to give her signal—three sounds she could not hear. A voice spoke after a pause which seemed interminable, and she said, "Is that Captain O'Hagan?"

"What's left of him," Den chuckled over the wires. "Why? Anything wrong?"

"I thought we were wrecked," Lucy crooned at the receiver. "Why is there so much water on deck and all that banging?"

"It's piping up a bit, oh Mem-sahib," came back the answer. "Nothing to speak of. The usual thing—what Angus calls 'oor luck.' Go to bed, there's a dear soul."

"I thought you were washed away, dearest. I woke with a number one scare, and the banging kept it going. What is it?"

"The drum all cargo-wallahs beat," he told her. "Seas tumbling on board . . . nothing to hurt though. She's doing fine—more Angus for you. How's the kiddie?"

"Asleep. He hasn't moved."

"Then do the same," he laughed.

"I'll try," she answered. "Night-night, oh dearest.

You've got the best of it . . . and, and I'd like to be up there, too ! "

And as she stood listening for his chaffing rejoinder, she heard the peal of a gong on the bridge, a sudden and very clamorous note which found an echo in her sinking courage. She spoke again. No answer came—only the drum note, the ceaseless thud of seas, the jangle of the screw and that humming sound which filled the cabin, peopling it with shapes and fancies which sapped her strength.

She replaced the receiver and crossed the room. It swayed again as before, a steep, lurching bob, then up, up with a quaking, creaking ascent which left her breathless. She reached her bed and climbed into it, sitting to watch the cot, the tilting deck ; to wait for the gushing swirl which told her a sea had washed her ports ; to listen for the thud and roar of water which swept the ship.

She was not afraid in the sense that she dreaded personal injury, or death by drowning ; but rather in that indefinable sense which comes of a highstrung temperament. She was alone and quite unused to it. The cabins and saloon which adjoined hers were tenantless and humming with mysterious sounds. She did not understand the difference between a mailship and a tramp even of the quality of the *Strathmuir*. Her experience had been of the floating palace order, and the wonderfully stable ships of the trooper service.

She remembered passing ships in the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and nearer home, burying themselves at each dive ; vessels which writhed along like submarines but without their stability or security from the slosh of water hurrying always from this side to that. She had looked upon the thing from the high promenade she footed as something amusing, something akin perhaps to the lash of waves on a coast, something to watch and laugh over. And now she was imprisoned in one of these same vessels, and not quite confident of her powers.

She felt rather ill, too. She had never been so before, and she sat there in her bed, her knees drawn up, her arms clasped about them watching the child, watching the angles made by the cot, the lamp, the barometer until she became dizzy.

The ship had entered upon an unending series of dives and pirouettes and squealing sidelong lurches. Nothing else under the sun, or that grey curtain which now was

drawn across their world. Nothing. The commonplace, everyday life of a tramp, which is known as a liner, whether carrying exports of cement and iron and machinery, or grain and gewgaws for the nation.

Four o'clock saw daylight peeping through the veil upon that spurring steamship moving in the wake of Jimmy Barlow. It sent a ray of light, beautiful in chromes and green, into the saloon ; but only the greyness touched the ports which lighted Lucy's cabin. It saw her leaning back amidst the pillows, her cloak still about her, her eyes closed, her dark hair thrown out across the white.

She had much to learn as the wife of one who commanded a cargo-wallah. Something to learn of trust, of resignation—of a life which leads no higher than to minister to the wants of a nation too luxurious, too smug to consider how it is tended.

CHAPTER IX

A LEGEND AT DAWN

"Oor luck."

That, after all, expressed without persiflage the attitude not only of Denis O'Hagan, but of his wife. Once, the notion had never stirred. Now it had arrived as the result of something they neither of them quite understood.

It is a phrase which falls very glibly from the lips of those who are accustomed to pit their will and force against Nature or the King's enemies. It stands in the repertory of all, but is more real for those who fight an unseen foe.

We march a column of men in close order up a hillside at night and are astonished that at the summit they are wiped out—"Oor luck!" We set a steamship to cross at full speed the ice drift which we know is there, and at the impact display amazement that she has gone to the bottom—"Oor luck!" We send a gingerbread collier or time-worn coaster to face a gale, laden so that the seas may comfortably climb on board and smash her, chip her piecemeal; and when she disappears somebody murmurs —"Oor luck," and perhaps it was.

At Lloyd's and kindred associations no doubt the luck is discounted. But for all that, when it comes to add up our losses or gains at the end of a year, there are those among us who call it luck if the dividend is good, "oor luck" if the scale is turned against a new set of sables for the lady who honours us by calling us "dear!"

Some men, it is true, can do nothing well, precisely as some business men can make no money. That is in the blood. It is rarely luck, although, in an aside to the Almighty, we profess to believe it. It is something either in the individual or the machine he tends—something elusive.

As a Bottle-filler for the nation and one who, in common with all other Bottle-fillers, had no jurisdiction in the matter, Messieurs les Doctrinaires directed O'Hagan to carry a deckload which made the *Sphinx* top heavy.

They said, with the usual flourish, it was necessary to do so in order that British ships might compete on terms of equality with "those others" who, rival-like, are banded to wipe us off the seas. Then when she became unmanageable, and while the sea, aided by a loosened deckload, chipped pieces off her, she went ashore to escape further torture, and there were some who cried in the worn old phrase—"Oor luck! Oor luck!"

The banality of it all! The supreme humiliation! Luck! Surrender after a whipping, is what it is—nothing more. Surrender flung out in the drawl of those a little hipped, perhaps, in the whine of those hammered.

It is not luck at all, but incompetence. Incompetence sometimes of man, it is true, sometimes of machinery; but more often of that power which stands over both man and his machine—*Messieurs les Doctrinaires.*

O'Hagan had heard the phrase so often of late that he was beginning to believe in it. He forgot that there is no more certain method of becoming unlucky than by pinning your faith to luck.

Witness this man's career. He stood at the top of his profession, such as it is, with certificates of the highest grade. An officer of the Mail-service—no smudge anywhere. Then because of Lucy Faulkner's love he came down from stateliness, and, to earn more, entered the ranks as skipper of the *Sphinx.* There, if you will, the element of luck came in. It was his fortune that he accepted the word of a person who on the Turf would be termed a welsher, warned off, branded. Thereafter any man trafficking with him would do it at his peril; but that is not a method which commends itself to the shipping community. It believes in competition—open and untrammelled. So too does the Turf—but it brands a scoundrel with "Welsher."

And now mark O'Hagan as he stood there to direct the plunging, dividend-earning *Strathmuir.* She was fighting her first gale. No soul on board knew how she would behave. She was as new to the sea as they were to her posturings. Every ship has her tricks, yet there was no flurry in O'Hagan's attitude, no questioning indecision. Experience in many vessels had taught him what to do, and he did it. But already he mentally noted that had he been able to control her lading she would have revelled

in more freeboard. Any officer on her bridge or in his bed, either engineer, from Angus to the boiler-maker, would already have been prepared to say—"With six inches more side she would be clean." At the moment, though, she was dirty as the phrase goes, wet—one of the finer type it is true, but wet and only a fraction less dangerous to her crew than are the *Sphinx*-like vessels of earlier days.

"Too deep, old son!" sang one.

"She's bitten off more than she can chew, dry," another.

And in the log-books mates and engineers entered the stirring phrase—"Strong gale. Ship labouring heavily and shipping heavy seas."

In similar conditions though, O'Hagan remembered that the *Sphinx* would have broken things up, as he phrased it.

At seven o'clock he made his way aft to bathe his eyes and take a cup of tea with Lucy. He had been on deck all night as well as the whole of the previous day. Lucy had been asleep only since dawn. They met with the cry which was their new watchword—"How's the kiddie, Mem-sahib?" and Lucy lifting from her pillows—

"The kiddie's slept like a top." Then—"Oh! Den —I did want you last night." She snuggled in his arms. He had discarded his oilskins and stood close.

"I tried to get to you once," she faltered. "I was so scared."

"Scared—you?"

He held back smiling. She nodded, clinging the more tightly.

"What of?" he breathed.

She shook that off, lifting her face to his.

"I wanted you, oh dearest—and, and—I felt a new sort of panic . . . don't know why, or what about. All that jumping, perhaps, and the water pouring over us . . . will she be like that always, Den?"

"While the bunkers are full," he answered, "and there's a gale . . . she will get better though when we've burnt a bit more coal."

"When?"

"Three or four days."

"But we shall be in fine weather then?"

"Yes——"

"Then that won't help us, Den."

"I admit she's a bit wet," he admitted ruefully.

"Wetter than you expected?"

"Yes—perhaps. . . . No, I can't say that. They are all wet these days. It's the way she's loaded . . . but she's solid, safe as houses. Come on deck and see how she goes through it. She's fine. If you had been in the old *Sphinx* you would see the difference. This is yachting. Get some things on and come on deck."

"What about the kiddie, dearest?" she whispered.

They turned to consider this and found the boy asleep, rosy, beautiful.

"He's snug enough," O'Hagan smiled. "Put Mrs. Cruickshank in charge and come up for a blow. It will do you good."

She pushed back the blankets and he discovered that she was dressed.

"Good gracious! All standing!" he chuckled. "You don't mean to say you've been like that all night?"

"Since one o'clock, oh dearest," she smiled up at him. "You see I was alone, Den . . . and, and I hadn't got used to the—the jumping I expect."

He considered this gravely as she climbed from bed. For a moment it came into his mind that she no longer had confidence in his skill: that the wreck, trial, and suspension in which he had become involved, had cost him more than he dreamed. But a glance at the sunny smile she lifted disarmed him.

"Come out," he whispered, "it will do you more good than anything else. Come out—you are my Queen."

She stood still, uncertain of his meaning.

"For a moment," he explained, "I thought you were afraid because—oh, because I lost the *Sphinx*." He laughed, but she caught his arm and clung there throbbing. "Stupid, wasn't it," he commented. "I am jolly glad you were able to come with me, if it is only to show you what a fool . . ."

He paused; her breast pulsed beneath his hand and hers. She said softly—

"Was that necessary, Den?"

"Which?"

"To test me?"

"No—no . . . but those beasts rubbed it in so—and your uncle scarcely softened the sting," he fumbled,

flushed and curiously boylike. "I was beginning to think everybody must have a sort of feeling that I was more or less a fool . . . and, and I couldn't bear that from you, Mem-sahib. . . ."

"You need not fear," she whispered, halting him.

"Yet it crops up, you know," he added, staring at the leaden horizon which declined swiftly as they swayed near a port.

"Banish it, my darling," she begged, her face alight and swiftly pleading.

He took that with a smile, a touch of the brogue pushed out to calm her.

"I'll thry," he said. "Sure, an' you would wheedle the stock off an anchor wid your blarney. There . . . I promise," he kissed her lips. "An' it's well for me an' you there's no one to see how you thwist me round your finger. Come on deck, mavourneen, come on deck and see her go. I'm in luck at last and want you to know it."

"Of course you are," she laughed. "I brought it!"

CHAPTER X

LAUS DEO

From her point of vantage on the *Strathmuir's* screened, lower bridge it seemed to Lucy that the ship no longer moved. In her cabin she had been sensible of an immense speed, a headlong butting at the seas which hissed past her ports; but up here all that gave place to something entirely unlike speed, something indeed pointing to a halt. She could not reconcile the two conditions, and Denis, who was already gone to the navigator's bridge to direct their progress, could not be called on to explain.

Lucy stood in consequence alone, clinging to the rail, a rope girdle about her waist. It seemed necessary to examine this problem which had so frightened her during the night. Up here it was flustering and tremendous. Den called it a summer's gale; but the *Strathmuir* made a terrible to do at facing it—that she admitted thrilling. It was indeed a fine slashing, head and heels dance, at once inspiring and dreadful to consider. Did all ships kick these capers? She questioned it.

A sea creamed over the rail and immediately beneath her was a white yeast of foam—water hurrying from side to side, bubbling, noisy—and beyond the narrow and tilting construction she footed it was worse. The *Strathmuir* looked like a plank on a boiling sea. In all her travels to and from India, China and Egypt, Lucy had never seen the sea quite like this, never been so near its bristles, never had dinned in her ears its message of supreme and herded contempt for mankind, his ships and his formulas. Nor had she ever before considered the matter.

From the high and secure insecurity of those decks she had been accustomed to promenade the seas had usually appeared very futile, small and tame. The passengers engaged in marching airily their mile or so, to create a breakfast or dinner appetite, were ready to appraise them at something less than their full value. They were ready

indeed to accuse the dear old *Saladin* of rolling, the monotonous and rather solemn roll of a heavily weighted pendulum; but they had never quite understood what rolling was. And now Lucy was taking it in; acknowledging, too, that it was less tame here, less smooth, more touched with danger—for those who walk the deck, tend a ship, and get her in face of odds from port to port.

As far as the eye could see, perhaps a mile, perhaps two, was a whitened circle of valleys and hills in impressive and kaleidoscopic ranges. The *Strathmuir* moved amidst these seas as a runner on ski labours upon an uneven surface. She floundered among hills which rolled to greet her. She came down one and found another at her toes. She dug into it, climbed cheerily to its summit, see-sawed there asking how she should take it, then flounced quaking in the hole it had left in its wake. There was no end to those hills. If she happened to be on even keel when one passed she drank greedily on either side; if she lay over, she scooped of the thing in tons, and the jar of its advent sent a thrill all through her strained butts as she picked herself amazingly white from the hole.

Well, after all, that was her business.

As Lucy had discovered, she moved very slowly. At first it appeared that she could never by any contrivance of jerks climb back from a dive; but with time it became evident that this was her considered method of progression in what Den had called "a bit of a flare up." Perhaps. And when they took into account the wonderful switchback they traversed, it was plain why the ship seemed to dive ten times at one hole before gathering way enough to reach others.

It was all very marvellous. The ship suggested by her posturings that this was nothing, very small beer, that one should wait until a sea arrived such as would be found out of soundings. This was a babble, a boiling pot into which the blunt wedge of her bow plunged, hid, and presently emerged climbing the grey dome as a matter of course. She had, perhaps, the sense of victory each time she emerged, the sense which a man finds who shows day after day some trick of wonderful risk in mid-air, knowing that it adds zest to the "turn." But all this was really thought out in Glasgow, hammered into her in steel, trimmed and twisted and rolled into that degree of endurance which comes at length to be reckoned as

seaworthiness. The old *Sphinx* would have twisted out rivets in this hubbub ; the *Strathmuir* marched as though no hubbub were there, slowly it is true, with the grind and crunch of a steam-roller.

With her maw full, full as Liverpool dare cram it, full as London or Cardiff or Glasgow itself in these days could cram it, she sloshed like a half-tide rock through seas which could not harm her as they would some others, but would easily harm those who tended her.

Down there in the well of the ship Lucy presently realised was a hatchway which at daylight men discovered " somehow " stripped of a tarpaulin. The boiling Channel seas had done this. Men appeared amidst the swirl drenched and exclamatory as they fought for safety. If one tarpaulin is ripped the others may follow ; if one set of clamps and wedges is torn away all are in danger—therefore it is essential always to repair damages when they are seen.

Four or five men were at work in this pit which Lucy faced wondering. How long they had endured she did not know. It made her gasp to watch them. She was unconscious of their danger but conscious of their bedraggled appearance, of the flattening power of the seas which struck them. From the security of a mail-ship's deck it would have seemed amusing as to watch the tub-tilters who gain a livelihood by fooling in the surf of a watering-place ; but on the *Strathmuir's* bridge, not very high above the main deck, Lucy was too near to qualify for applause. Besides, Denis seemed anxious. He was manœuvring the engines and the helm so that the *Strathmuir* should not add to the men's danger by proceeding too jauntily. Now and again his voice was raised in warning, then the men made haste to escape, and again returned to hammer and wrestle with screws, bars, wedges and a great black cloth which they were fastening upon the others.

They worked in rushes. Sometimes nothing at all was done. Sometimes laughter was heard, sometimes the jargon men talk when engaged in a fight. Then Lucy noted a cry, short and crisp, from the navigating bridge—" Look out, there ! " and found herself breathless and clinging more tightly to the rail she faced. She could not then have explained why she clung, why it suddenly seemed that she was hanging over a trap which was

bottomless ; but she knew that a great weight had come upon her arms, a weight which strove to force her backwards. It was her own weight.

The *Strathmuir* had stumbled on "a nasty one," that is all. One of those odd rollers which march the playground looking for something to knock down, bowl over and maim. The men who worked on the hatch felt the thing coming. It was foreshadowed by the appalling climb attempted by the *Strathmuir*, by the swift death of the wind, and the breaker-like roar which crashed upon the silence. They heard, too, O'Hagan's shout and made for security in a bunch ; but the sudden spring of that giant of Soundings shook them and one stumbled.

Then the sea swept solid as a wall upon the bulkhead, and taking the fallen sailor on its tide, used him as a battering ram ; as a bolt thrown by a catapult upon walls of steel rolled in the mills of Glasgow.

It is known as soft steel ; but it sufficed. And when the man was very still the seas which filled the well played rounders with him until those who were unsilenced rescued what was left of him and carried it below.

Broken arms, thigh bones, shanks ; dislocations, abrasions, Bottle-fillers the world over are prepared to doctor ; but a skull which has received injuries at the hands of mild steel is beyond all amateur surgery.

Therefore the man died, and the sea down there by the Great Sole Bank received him in the grey dawn which followed.

There were, of course, those on board who, arguing from the plenitude of their knowledge, saw in this christening incident an omen of what is called bad luck.

There were others who considered that after all it is as comfortable to be knocked out by a sea as in a crank-pit ; as well to be brained on deck as driven mad in an engine-room. There were others, a minority too, who said that if a man can't look after himself when a ship is in a sea-way, it is his own fault if he is hurt. There were others who talked viciously and stupidly of what they would do with the head of authority, could they "get it in that wash." They damned the new rule, the men who framed it, the experts who advised it—but with greater vehemence they damned the personage who, in the seclusion of his office, made it what they called "Law."

Angus, however, in an aside to Mrs. O'Hagan, summed up the situation without having heard the varying comments.

"All ships are dirty under the new order," he said, "but some are dirtier than others. Wait till we get out of this popple before ye smudge a verra desairvin' steamship."

And to Lucy's astonishment her husband rather backed this opinion.

"I have very little doubt from what the mate tells me, that the man was a bit of a greenhorn," he announced. "You can't play the fool when a ship is deep and in a sea-way. Poor devil—he knows that now."

They all knew.

As the hours passed, and by slow degrees the sea became less broken, they recognised that only a staunch vessel could have emerged from that stirred-up wrath unharmed. Then as they drew out of it, they met the Atlantic roll.

They still climbed and fell in ordered monotony, rolled, twisted, lurched; they still filched something from each giant as it passed; but there remained no longer to harass them the thing seamen call a "popple," a "boiling pot" with deceptive adjectives flaringly evident; they had come out of that and discovered once more the Atlantic hills and dales. They found comfort in the fact.

Then when they were rather more than midway across the bay, the wind moved to the north and fell. Finisterre they passed in a glassy calm, the sun pouring down upon them, decks dry, sailors basking, firemen sweltering—sea boots turned with mouths gaping, set wide to the heat. Vigo, where Jimmy Barlow had put in to repair damages, they passed as though it were not. The Burlings looked down upon them, through a heat haze which miraged the further land. Roca took signals from flags which stood out only because impelled by the draught of the ship's passage. Lanes of steamers converge here. From the north they come, from the south, from the east, some few from the west, drawing long lines of smoke upon the blue sea. In the main they are the ships which feed England and carry her produce to the lands of the sun.

And so, now with a light breeze fanning them from the west, now with the dawdling north-east trades, they moved on, gaining slowly on the little *Casa Blanca*, the will-o'-the-

wisp tug which was to win back a man's honour. They questioned of the signal stations had she passed, and received a last word of her progress at the De Verdes. They learned that Jimmy Barlow was pushing on, that he was " all well," and judged him to be halfway across that great stretch which lies between the islands and Pernambuco.

O'Hagan pored over the chart plotting out Jimmy Barlow's will-o'-the-wisp passage with as keen an interest as that given to his own. He was in the tropics, somewhere between St. Paul's Rock and Fernando Noronha, that signal island for the old time sailing ships warning them to stand east if they desired to escape the calms of Brazil.

The *Strathmuir* was in the tropics also. Lighter than when she faced that gale in Soundings, awnings spread over her, clinkers ascending from the great mouth of her funnel and descending in showers upon their whiteness. Dream-days of airy brilliance, the wind presently coming across the smooth sea in violet patches from the south; still nights of starlit radiance when Lucy sat in a long deck chair at work on Baba's small garments, and Den reclined beside her, the bridge less imperiously his master.

She had learned to know the gallant *Strathmuir* and to trust her buoyancy. The close approach of the sea no longer troubled her. The tilting, climbing misery of a sea-way were things pushed away and forgotten. Baba took kindly to his experience, crowed, drank, gurgled and grew amazingly wise. He learned that hair was provided in order to be pulled, and pulled it. He learned that it is fine, in the tropics, to be without shoes, and twisted toes in triumph. He learned to wear fewer garments.

Den, too, had forgotten his troubles. He was the boy-man Lucy had learned to love on the *Saladin*, a little graver perhaps, as became the father of a son and heir and the master of a ship's progress; but her sailor-lover whose destiny as a commander in the Eastern Mail service, R.N.R., and perhaps R.D., and D.S.O., had been changed for the masterhood of a tramp in order that they two might journey through life together.

They confessed content. At the moment they asked no other happiness.

The *Strathmuir* moved alone in these days, the sole occupant of a circle which held them for its hub. The track

they drew was but the beginning of an endless array which the years must see. It vanished now in a northern haze, and with its growth had vanished trouble. God be praised!

Sometimes they crossed a shoal of porpoise and leaned out to watch the gambolling; sometimes that pink and white fragility we know as the nautilus was the sole adventurer in their path; sometimes, with clipping note, a shoal of flying fish dashed past their bulk. For the rest there was quiet, a placid sea of marvellous iridescence, clouds of the filmiest, and the ceaseless throb of the heart of the ship, deep down where Angus and his men worked shirtless and unashamed.

Peace had fallen upon the fortunes of Denis O'Hagan, Lucy O'Hagan, and that small O'Hagan who had had the temerity to get himself born. Peace at the beckoning of Worsdale, the king and fine judge of men.

But beyond stood McClure, even as beyond the tropics there stood for Jimmy Barlow the Southern Ocean.

CHAPTER XI

THE WAY TO THE STARS

Amidst the flat brownness of that shallow and turgid estuary to which the Spaniards gave the ringing name of Rio de la Plata, the *Strathmuir's* voyagers presently descried their will-o'-the-wisp friend, the *Casa Blanca*. The river which receives the mud and rotting vegetation of the Parana, Uruguay, and their giant tributaries, carried over there beyond the lightship, shoulder high, a little tug at anchor, dressed in flags.

It was the rainbow dressing that drew O'Hagan's glasses to search her out, and in a moment his practised sailor eyes told him of Jimmy Barlow's success. They drew nearer and espied Jimmy Barlow himself marching his small bridge, telescope under arm, ready at the correct moment to salute his old commander.

They drew alongside, going dead slow, and a cheer fell on Jimmy Barlow's ears to encourage him. Then O'Hagan's voice speaking through a megaphone said—

"Well done, *Casa Blanca*"—and Jimmy Barlow thrilled as he stood at the salute, his small Chilean ensign dropped to the taffrail while the giant moved past.

"I am sailing to-night," crooned Jimmy, when the ensigns again fluttered at the trucks. "I meant to sail this morning, but I heard you were spoken."

"Come on board!" O'Hagan cried.

"I will, if I swim," returned Jimmy Barlow; then he made for a boat which hung at the quarter.

"Stop!" came the order, and instantly the engine room telegraph clanged. The pilot was amazed, but he considered it wise to take no heed of the affront. It was obvious there would be but little delay, and the brown flood ran smoothly past, gurgling with the weight of the slime it carried. He crossed over and stared at the small tug which had brought this stately one to a halt. These *capitans* of ships Ingleses were strange beings. Masterful—oh, yes! He twisted a cigarette, lighted and breathed

smoke. "Bime-by, in little time or in big time, we go on 'gain. *No importa.*"

He remained watching until Jimmy Barlow climbed on board and O'Hagan ran down to the lower bridge to greet him. He saw him grasp O'Hagan's hand and heard that strange *capitan*, who so far had spoken neither of welcome nor of his voyage to the pilot, say—

"By gad! Jimmy, but this is great. I do like your pluck. . . . Come up and see Mrs. O'Hagan."

The pilot lifted his shoulders and, looking down, said scathingly—

"Per'aps now, *Señor Capitan*, we make move of the engine—go on—no?"

"Certainly, pilot. By all means. I will be there in a minute."

The *Strathmuir* responded once more to the thrill of a propeller which had pushed her thus far in safety over the seas.

And on the lower bridge Lucy and Denis and Jimmy Barlow exchanged rapidly the outstanding features of their individual trips. . . .

"Oh, yes—she's a fine sea-boat; but I got an awful dressing off Finisterre . . . thought she was for down the cellar," said Jimmy Barlow, his face puckered with laughter. He fingered the new stubble which covered his chin as of old.

"Ah! we heard of that . . . heard you had gone on, too; then we started and got caught in Channel."

"Edge of Soundings, sir?"

"Faith! You've hit it."

"I got through there pretty slick," said Jimmy Barlow.

"And *we* got it fine in the Bay."

"Just where I had it rough. I got no peace till after we left Agadir . . . since then we've been yachting. Fallen on our feet, sir, in spite of 'em." He shadowed the Board of Trade here and the straits they had endured since their trial at Jake Hall. "Who would have thought it?" he inquired, his eyes grave, the cockney accent pushed away.

"Neither of us," O'Hagan admitted.

Jimmy Barlow cast an admiring glance over the trim decks—"You've got a fine ship, sir, too."

"Rather. One of the Glasgow bull dogs."

"Can't beat 'em," said Jimmy Barlow.

"True—you can't. . . . Well, we must have a yarn

presently. As soon as I can get her fast I will be with you again. . . . Lucy, take him along and show him the boy."

With that Captain O'Hagan rejoined a disconsolate Argentino and stood to see that he did no damage to the liner *Strathmuir*, which had halted and so flatteringly taken notice of a tug boat.

The pilot continued to smoke cigarettes until he was relieved by an equally accomplished craftsman at the port; then he presented his paper for signature, saluted, and gravely entered his boat. But it was not until after lunch, and the *Strathmuir* secure at the wharf, that O'Hagan could spare time to talk quietly with his friend.

Jimmy Barlow was Henry Tompson as on that day when the two men met at the Isle of Dogs. He would have resented from anyone else that old name which had been dragged through the mire. Jimmy Barlow was dead, and strangely the mannerisms of Henry Tompson were less violent. Enery was no longer enforced. He permitted the aspirate to appear, and no longer misapplied it.

He explained to O'Hagan that it was necessary at the Isle of Dogs where the other Henry Tompson might have been known, but here—"Well, it ain't worth the trouble of thinking. I got back my h's with a jump—no one aboard the *Casa* knows the differ, an' I'm gettin' back my beard by degrees." He fingered the brown stubble as he rose from the table, smiling sheepishly at Mrs. O'Hagan, who declared openly that she preferred clean chins.

The two men passed through the saloon and made their way to the chart room. O'Hagan visualised a smoke; but Jimmy Barlow, in spite of a large cigar, was not at his ease. He returned again and again to the question of his wonderful luck—"Will it hold?" he threw out. "Can it possibly hold—down here . . .?"

O'Hagan saw the drift and rallied him on it. "It depends entirely on yourself," he said at length. "If you are game and don't take unnecessary risks you will win. . . ."

"May I shut the door?" asked Jimmy Barlow, with a puff of smoke which hid him.

"Certainly."

"It will make it warm, but I don't want all hands to

know that I have any belief in that sort of thing. I haven't, either, if it comes to plain talk. Never had . . . but—well, I'm bothered. . . ."

He came back from shutting the door and sat on the stool which stood before the chart table, facing O'Hagan.

" I'm bothered for the first time this trip by something I'm not accustomed to. . . . I don't know how to fight it. You can slam at a gale, if your boat's one of the right sort ; but you can't slam at an idea. Yes—that's it. An idea—a silly, no-sense sort of thing drummed into me by my mate—a chap I should have sworn hadn't two in his nut . . . not two to knock one against the other—no, siree, not one. Then he outs with this *dream* thing of his and knocks me off my pins in a manner of speaking, as if I'm a kid. . . ."

The depth of his degradation was nicely graded by Jimmy Barlow's rich voice. He laughed at himself, he jeered at the mate, but he came back in a circle to question how much was true and whether laughter was precisely the kind of weapon he should use.

" A dream ? " O'Hagan repeated, not in mockery, but with the sense of wonder evident in his eyes.

" Just that," said Jimmy Barlow. Then he blew a fine flurry of cigar smoke and looking through it added, " not mine either, sir. Don't know that I ever had a dream in my life. Not had much time to play the fool with dreams . . . but, well, the fact is my mate left me. And it was because of a dream. *Waratah* on the brain . . . that's what's the matter with him. Don't know when he's comfortable, sir . . . don't know enough to keep himself warm, if you ask me—an' yet "—his voice dropped slightly—" of course there are true dreams now an' again . . . like everything else that's a toss up anyhow. . . ."

" Tell me," said O'Hagan, as Jimmy Barlow leaned forward, elbows on knees and forgot to smoke.

" Oh ! as far as that goes there's nothing to tell. Seems he had this dream first when we sighted Pernambuco, but he said nothing about it till one night after we got away from Rio, then when I relieved him at twelve o'clock, says he—' Cap'n, if we fetch the Plate '—' if,' you note—' you'll have to find anover chap to take on my job.' ' So ? ' says I ; ' how's that ? ' ' Don't feel comfortable,' says he. ' Not enough tucker or grog ? ' I asked. ' Think I'm a bloomin' fool ? ' says he. ' If you ask me, yes,' says I,

' if you are goin' to chuck the job. . . . Go on,' I says to him, ' what's got in your bonnet, now—some gell at Rio ? '

" And to make a short story of it, sir, he tells me all about this dream he's dreamed off Pernambuco, and I could do nothing with him because the night he spoke to me about getting another mate, he said he'd dreamt the same thing again. Word for word—*so he said,*" Jimmy Barlow accentuated, drawing solemnly at his cigar.

" He said," he resumed as O'Hagan made no sign, " that he dreamt we were down among icebergs, and that it came to blow a howling buster—*pampero,* I think he called it . . . anyway something to sneeze over—and the *Casa Blanca* wouldn't face it . . . got her fires drowned out—water over the stokehold plates, all as pat as you like . . . then somehow, ' as happens in a dream,' he says, we were somewhere down off the Patagonia coast on a lee shore with this here buster blowing us on top of the land.

" ' A long, shelving beach,' it was, he said. ' Couldn't see it until we were a-top of it. Couldn't have done anything if we had—'cause she's broke down . . . can't move, and there she drifts an' him listenin' to a voice that said—' Why didn't you get out of her when you had the chance ? Now there is no chance,' the voice hummed it at him, ' no chance, no chance, you silly gossoon.'

" And that," said Jimmy Barlow, " this Neddy on two legs tells me he can't get out of his head. He was like a seal, that mate, couldn't face a gale out of the water . . .

" ' Seems to me,' I says to him, ' you're Pharaoh dished up all over again ; but if you think I'm going to play Joseph for you, you don't know butter from a keg of slush. Take your hook out of it,' says I, ' an' don't go croakin' your dreams all over the Argentine or I'll not get a mate.' And——" said Jimmy Barlow, then he paused, took a pull at his cigar, drew the end red, looked at it, flicked off the ash and sat with pursed lips.

" And what ? " O'Hagan questioned.

" Oh, well," said Jimmy Barlow, " I couldn't get one, an' so I'm goin' on without."

O'Hagan took this to mean that there was no necessity for additional help, then something in Barlow's attitude warned him to ask—

" How many are you on deck without this mate ? "

" Two," said Jimmy Barlow.

"Counting yourself?"

"Just that, sir."

"Don't be a fool, man," O'Hagan urged, his calm disturbed. "What is the use of doubling your risk . . . isn't it big enough as it is?"

"As for that," came the answer, then with a roll of importance and in another key, Jimmy Barlow added—"I'm goin' to take the *Casa Blanca* to Val-i-paraiso, where she belongs. I've waited a week lookin' for a mate and I can't get one. They all jump at it till they see the boat—then they jump out."

"Let me see what I can do," O'Hagan urged. "I'll ask my agents—they may be able to do something."

But Jimmy Barlow shook his head. "Can't stay longer, sir. My agents had a cable, I saw it, from Val-i-paraiso"—again he rolled the word—"sayin' they would have to get someone to take over my job if I didn't move along. I've been on the beach already . . . you remember London? an'—well, there you are . . . I'm sailin' to-night. If I didn't sail to-night—an' God knows the weather hasn't stopped me since I came south—I should get shunted. Can't do that," said Jimmy Barlow. "There's a tidy cheque due to me when I get her round . . . an'—an' there's the old gell to think of—an' the kids . . . er . . . Cap'n O'Hagan—tell me honest—what is there in dreams . . . That sort . . . anythin' or nothin'?"

O'Hagan smoked in silence. He was scarcely prepared for the sudden change, and before he could formulate a reply Jimmy Barlow's laugh rang out—

"You have a sort of belief in 'em, sir . . . of course. An' so have I——"

"Wait a bit. . . ."

"Think I can't see," Barlow questioned with emphasis. Then he rose and stood pointing with his cigar—

"I have a sort of belief . . . but I'm not goin' to let it stand in my way. I have a sort of belief . . . but there's nothin' this side of God Almighty's grave that's goin' to stop me. . . . Dreams may be fizzle an' they may not—but if you stop to test 'em you'll never get anywhere. No sir!" He waved his cigar. "With the help of General Jackson and a few policemen I'm going to ferry the *Casa Blanca* what's left of the trip. That's what I drew those gold boys to do—an' there isn't a man ashore or afloat that shall say Henry Tompson started his new hand by playing

it low on them that trusted him. . . . No shinannikin for me, siree—not much."

He marched up and down the small room hammering out his points, his face set very much as O'Hagan remembered in that far off scene at the Isle of Dogs. There was the same swift and cutting speech, the same thrilling attitude of semi-bravado—the attitude of a dog over a bone he has won in spite of the bareness he has discovered. Barlow had been on the beach. He had seen others so situated—heard their snarling excuses, the paltry lies with which they strove to cover their disgrace. "No shinannikin for me!" It sounded like a challenge, as indeed it was, to the gods of wealth and power who, when a man's nose is on the grindstone, keep it there and twist the handle.

O'Hagan fought this attitude.

With a smile on his sunburnt face Jimmy Barlow brought his forces into action. He challenged again. "Is a man with the pluck of a louse likely to draw in his head because of dreams?"

O'Hagan countered this with—"Of course not; the question is not one of dreams but of going to sea without a mate."

He pleaded for patience, for consideration, for one night longer in harbour while O'Hagan ran up to the office in B.A., to see what could be done; but he could not move Jimmy Barlow.

He had had luck. If he played with time he would break his luck . . . he wasn't going to risk that—no siree! "And those agent sharks all ready with a man to fork into the *Casa Blanca's* cabin if I don't get a move on. Likely, isn't it . . . and," reverting again to the tragedy foreseen by his mate, "just because I have a sort of notion, that sometimes, very sometimes, a man may be able to read what's not in print. . . ." He leaned forward, earnest, still for a moment of time. "I ask you, sir . . . what is there in it?"

"In dreams? Nothing to stop a man, my friend."

"But you ask me to wait?"

"For a mate, yes—not because of the man's dreams. Do you know what you are facing—the Straits, thousands of miles of open sea—the worst seas in the world, ice, snow—willy-waws, and no harbours worth consideration . . . ?"

Jimmy Barlow came back with a jerk.

"I'm goin', sir," he said without emphasis. "If I stay an' listen to you I'll be in the same hole as if I'd listened to my mate. *I'm bound to go.* After what happened to you an' me in the *Sphinx* there's no sort of use jibbin' at conditions. Out there there's a job for me —if I stay about I shall be given my walkin' ticket when I get there. I can't afford to risk that. . . ."

He came quite near O'Hagan and held out his hand. "Mrs. O'Hagan is asleep," he said. "You say so long for me—not good-bye, sir. . . . I never say that"—he jerked his head and drew himself up; "it's so beastly formal," came in explanation. Then, as O'Hagan took his hand and held it, he added—"Nothing about dreams —though . . . or our short-handedness. Women don't take to that sort of thing. Or, if you must, tell her of that chap—Cap'n Something or other—who came across the Atlantic the other day in an open boat, not because he had to, but for the fun of the thing—eh?"

"Of course," O'Hagan nodded to hearten him. "Take it easy, though. Don't let agents harry you . . . if it is bad weather get in somewhere till . . ."

"Trust me, sir."

"Charts all right—no stint, eh?"

"None."

"Good—and you won't wait?"

"Daren't." Jimmy Barlow blundered into a laugh and added, shaking his friend's hand—"You'll see the wife an' kids before I will . . . cheer 'em up—give 'em chin-chin. . . ."

"I will," said O'Hagan.

"An' now, as I've finished my smoke," Jimmy Barlow threw out, "I guess I'll get away—so long, sir. . . . For the sake of old days—eh?"

From the *Strathmuir's* high side O'Hagan watched him walking swiftly to reach the boats which lie waiting to take men off to the ships. The dust from the piers and wharves rolled past blotting him out. The steam from Great Southern engines labouring with giant loads from Bahia Blanca enveloped him—and when at last the pier became visible Jimmy Barlow's slim form was no longer there.

Like a traveller emerging upon a plain he had come for a few hours into the lives of those who had followed him; then the simoom had passed over him and he was gone.

For long O'Hagan stood looking out upon that scene which had swallowed him, listening to his phrases, one so often repeated—" No shinannikin for me—if you please. No, siree ! " and again—" You'll see the wife and kids before I will. Cheer 'em up."

Pace tuâ, oh friend !—was that, too, prophetic ?

CHAPTER XII

THE CLOSING OF GATES

In a general way the record of a Bottle-filler's impressions of a stay in a foreign port would go to prove that he had seen nothing of it.

In the main it would be a tale of unending noise and dust and work; of the clatter of winches and the jar of cargo going out and coming in; of a strange jargon spoken by weird "lumpers," *sans-culottes*, shock-headed and vociferant. It would be a tale of work which goes on by day and by night, Sundays, all days, without extra pay—for an officer. And it would be the same, sandwiched with "visits to my agents," drinks accepted, drinks refused, drinks paid for, together with dusty rides and walks in streets which blaze—for a captain.

A dull story. The story of drab surroundings, place them in what seaport you will, of work which is mechanical and deadening to the senses; work which is monotonous, done by men from whom all snap and originality have been drilled in the steady strides of speed and economy.

Sailors are people who scrub paintwork and chip iron rust. Officers are tally clerks answerable for weights they have not tested. Apprentices are boys getting an insight into violence, debauchery and the primitive passions of a race of sailors no longer even speaking their tongue. Cargoes are whirled in or out in a handful of hours, sucked out by vast machines in a smother of dust; tipped in from trucks seized in the jaws of monstrous lifts and showered from on high with the jar and rattle of platoon firing. The noise comes as from heaven, the tramp shivers as she receives it and the men who tend her wait for the moment when "leave" permits them to kill thought at the casino, the café chantant and kindred saturnalia provided for their undoing.

Sometimes it is merely a night of five or six hours, and it is spent in the whirl to which the soul-deadened drift.

Here touts abound—evil of speech, evil of design,

together with the vendors of obscenity. They will lure you to haunts where women will take care of you, drug you, strip you and thrust you forth in a paper shirt. Women of all races are there to choose from; women who dance and sing and sprawl—drinking to keep the devil alive in them, thought and memory buried. The greater the seaport, the more civilised the community, the more costly are these flashes from the souls of the lost to the souls of the snared. That at once is the reason why men and boys who march with the forgotten, hide it from their mothers—their brothers, even though they die in the hiding.

There exist elsewhere, of course, for the Bottle-fillers, other modes of recreation. They squat at the edge of streets which respectability shuns,—somewhere near "Sailor-town," or "China-town" or "Nigger-town," which are all under various designations comfortably near the edge of the pit. Here a meeting-house is set up. It is generally known as a "Bethel," or a "Mission," and it has been built to draw men from contact with the devil by drumming into their ears the dreary and monotonous alternative of "worship."

This of itself is a singular remedy. A bell tinkles at certain hours and those who answer its summons proceed dismally to howl and pray. All the talk provided is of roaring lions, never of sunshine and the fields. These places exhibit on their walls in the vividest colouring the uncomfortable descent of all thirsty Bottle-fillers into Hades. There is a great deal of smoke about that part of the picture and it appears that the man is in danger from two sources, always painted with snakish malignity —drink and women. And, if those who administer this soul-stirring succeed in capturing a Bottle-filler tired with the roar and dust of a day's work, they stuff his pockets with tracts printed in letters so large that a blind man might feel them.

The distribution of a certain number of bales of this kind of stupidity seems to be the *raison d'être* of a Bethel, or mission, or any of those worn traps known as meeting-houses which shout aloud—

"All Sailors are Welcome.
Come Early.
Come Often."

Seaports all the world over have these satiric outpourings blazoned on the gates or windows of the trap provided. Sometimes the trap is sandwiched between gin palaces—as in Merrie England; sometimes it sits in a dismal *cul-de-sac* of the docks as a hulk joined to the wharf by a gangway up which the Bottle-filler may trudge feeling at home. Sometimes it is far away from every other note of civilisation—planted down firmly in the city's gutters, like a coffee stall, where it is noisy and dirty and foul.

There is no alternative for the Bottle-filler, a work-sodden stranger, but to go to the haunts of vice or the haunts of prayer—and, on the whole the whirl of vice is more alluring. Dismal is his day on board. Dismal the hole in which he lives. Dismal his journey towards the grave most sailors fill. He requires an antidote to misery not groans of supplication. He has seen God's hand on the sea, in the heavens that stoop over him, in the myriad wonders of the deep, and he fails to recognise Him within tin barns. For that reason if for no other he kills time in the Halls.

Buenos Ayres has gems of this sort; so, too, have London and Liverpool and Marseilles and Lisbon and Naples—east, west, north, south; wherever, in point of fact, there exists a town of singular wealth and prosperity where ships may come to bask and sweat through stifling days and nights of no-rest, there exists a Hall for the Bottle-fillers.

Each in its peculiar and characteristic fashion, you may depend. Blazoned here. Discreet there. Spangles and tights here. Prunes and prisms there.

Nevertheless they are one. One in aim, one in action—to strip the Bottle-filler, to relieve him of his so-easily acquired gold, and so to fill the pockets, swell the banking accounts and make life easy for the parasite who sits in receipt of Custom.

That is the aim.

If the men and apprentices and officers of the *Strathmuir* had opportunities to examine either the Halls or the Traps, it is beyond question that O'Hagan had none.

He was in a difficult position—one of a dwindling band in a seaport filled by tramps. Winchester had left its mark on him precisely as Eton or Harrow leave theirs on

the men who pass through them. He was an aristocrat in manner without any of the appurtenances of his kind. Master of a Tramp. One of a round score who met daily at the agents'. He was one of a type indeed which for many a year slowly has been elbowed from the British Merchant Service, but the junior partner at his agency very soon recognised his man. As Stephen Hammond had discovered him, so young Ridesdale found no difficulty either in exposing him or raking him with questions. It all came out in the swift, modern way—

"I seem to know your name. . . . Public school man, aren't you?"

"Yes. Winchester."

"Thought so. What year? . . . I was there myself till they chucked me out here."

Further scraps produced evidence on which there could be no question. The firm had unearthed a gentleman, as the phrase goes, in the shape of a skipper consigned to their care, a man whose wife also was a lady. In face of credentials so pleasing and manners so charming, it became necessary to show this couple some hospitality. Mrs. O'Hagan at all events must be persuaded to come away from the ship, bring the prodigy with her and pay us a visit. The world is full of undreamed-of kindliness, and here "Us," as may be gathered, was young Mrs. Ridesdale, who had followed the fortunes of her husband when he had been chucked to the Argentine. She "rather liked" the look of Lucy and wanted to talk to someone who had no twang. This happened after a testing expedition amidst the shops and restaurants of the city.

There followed a migration for Lucy to B.A.'s wealthiest suburb. The ship and ship life vanished as under the wand of a magician. The gap between captain and agent was crossed, bridged by Winchester and mutual associations. As in Glasgow in the early days of O'Hagan's new and amazing fortune, so in the Argentine, where he worked with an increasing sense of freedom.

The nightmare trial had lost its power to sting, the allegations of insobriety fell away. He was awake again, alive, the partner of a woman of his own standing who had always believed in him, worked for him and had that high-bred air which is at once recognised by those who have enjoyed similar advantages. While O'Hagan walked with head erect attending to his business, Lucy saw the

splendid streets and shops of this "Paris" of South America. O'Hagan lunched and dined at hotels where prices were extortionate, but on a par with the enormous salaries of the men who were their patrons. They rode, drove, visited the pampas and theatres, listened to opera and talked of poor Jimmy Barlow who was pushing his way towards emancipation on the Chilean coast. They questioned, could he win through?

Then from Bahia Blanca came word of a pampero which swept the seas to the south of the Plate; but produced no evidence of the little *Casa Blanca*.

O'Hagan was on tenterhooks when the news was spread. Bahia Blanca, it appeared, was devastated, crops ruined, the great Southern Railway damaged by floods, estancias laid waste, cattle drowned; but of Jimmy Barlow there came no sound. Nor had the ports of which inquiry was made seen anything of him.

In the agents' offices in B.A. O'Hagan and young Ridesdale pored over charts which pourtrayed that lonely sea and coast which stretches from Bahia Blanca south, to Cape Virgins in the Magellan. Jimmy Barlow had been away on his long stretch to the south for nine days. The pampero of which his mate had dreamed had come and gone. How far south it had raged one could not say; but beyond Bahia Blanca and the Rio Negro there is little opportunity for shelter until the Magellan is reached. And there, one has arrived in the district given over to willy-waws, gales accompanied by snows against which the *Casa Blanca* could not steam.

O'Hagan decided in his mind that Jimmy Barlow had reached a point somewhere between Cape Tres Puntas and the Virgins, that he should have been outside the range of this disturbance, as it is labelled—but was he?

Down there you are approaching Antarctica and the world is a table land, blank, dreary, vast. Harbours, towns, aid—as we understand it with our lifeboats, coastguards and rocket apparatus—do not exist. Man is face to face with Nature—with the sea, with ice, gales and a race of savages none too friendly. Had Jimmy Barlow and his cockle-shell destined for Valparaiso escaped these perils? Was he secure once again as after Vigo and Agadir, resting on his oars in spite of dreams, in spite of the bluff audacity of his exit shorthanded from Buenos Ayres? O'Hagan could not say. He had a conviction to which

time alone could give the lie. He knew that it was as easy to assert how they met their end who were put away in the dungeons of the Inquisition as to state how it was with a ship which has passed from the ken of telegraphy.

Besides, O'Hagan was busy brightening his own escutcheon and exceedingly alive to the necessities of despatch. It seems that cargo had no sooner commenced to tumble out than he itched to be away in a twinkling. He had spent a fortnight waiting. He had enjoyed every hour of it—but these were times of the great boom. Ships moved on a circle as though chained. Coal or general merchandise six thousand miles to the Plate, water ballast rather farther to some Gulf port, then home—perhaps twenty thousand miles.

In half a dozen words it had been ordered by cable, the *Strathmuir* taken by the nose, skipper, crew, engines—the altogether, in point of fact—set throbbing for U.S.A. How light she was to be, how much coal would be necessary to get her there, how she would act in this new trim were matters arranged by O'Hagan's agents. As captain he put his name to the foot of many papers and became responsible for vast sums which he had not tested; for weights which perhaps were correct and which he could not check. That is the system by which an agency lives. It seems to pay.

The *Strathmuir*, too, was a pantechnicon of wonderful capacity; but she echoed like a bin. She was to be empty. Her crew on the voyage to U.S.A. would have her cavernous spaces to clean and chip and polish. Meanwhile there was coal to put away, derricks to house, gins and ropes to put out of sight. No room for speculation on Jimmy Barlow here. Jimmy Barlow must paddle his own canoe, get out or get under in the modern senseless fashion. The *Casa Blanca* was attempting under the guidance of a skilled Bottle-filler to carry out the final requisition of her contract, in order that certain defined sums should pass from the account of the owners to those who built her. Whether she was fit to undertake this journey or unfit is beside the point. She was on her way. Her builders and her owners were secure against loss, but Jimmy Barlow in his capacity as Bottle-filler was unsecured. So too were " his wife and kids," his engineers and the " hands " who accompanied him.

Whether a contract of that kind is moral or immoral

is a question on which much ink may be spilled; that it has not the soul of a tin can is evident at the outset. But the question of Jimmy Barlow was shouldered out by the rush of activity which fell upon O'Hagan. Advice came to him restrained and definite from his agents up town. Orders which would have made old-time Bottle-fillers froth at the mouth.

Get her along—that was the essence of them. Take what is given you, and clear out—that usually at the back of them. Orders of all sorts came down to the wharf by telephone. Questions arrived in the same way. Was Captain O'Hagan there? He was. Very well, sir; fifteen cases of pickles and forty-nine cases of Bass are found ullaged in store—what is the explanation?

From the ship's point of view there can, of course, be but one—it has happened since landing. The consignees dispute this. They say it happened on board. The wharf people, being of the same kidney, back the consignees, remembering, of course, the approach of a certain festival. The nearer the festival the louder they become in upholding the integrity of the wharf; and it all becomes very twisted, very serious for the officer of the hold, a matter of principle for the ship and her crew.

If by any possibility the act of God can be impaled, then sworn testimony is forthcoming. If the ullaging is obviously due, as it usually is, to pilferers with levers and the wherewithal to draw corks, then the matter must be settled by arbitration which raps the ship's knuckles, or the courts which sit on them and take no heed of an owner's squeals. He, poor man, is a long way off—and swollen by prosperity. Therefore squeeze.

But a captain is kept very busy. O'Hagan earned every penny of his twenty-five pounds a month. So, too, did the skipper of a gaunt collier who lay next astern of the *Strathmuir* . . . but in his case it happened to be twelve-pounds-a-month-and-no-back-talk-or-out-you-go.

A further industry was provided for O'Hagan just as other matters were getting wound up. They were within half a dozen hours of sailing. Lucy had returned to her home, and some of the derricks were already in crutches, when the mate reported the loss of two A.B.'s and one of the apprentices.

Of course it was open to O'Hagan to put the matter into the hands of the Argentine police and sit down to

await the runaways' capture ; or he might have seen His Britannic Majesty's Consul, or his own agents ; but he did none of these things. He said to the mate instead—

" Anything due to them ? "

" A few dollars perhaps."

" Taken their gear ? "

" Every rag."

" Well—I'm sailing at three o'clock—four at the latest. Get someone to fill the gaps."

Then the mate went away and talked with a boarding-house master who had the runaways safely at home ; bargained for " two Johns " and one " chico John," and the boarding-house master produced in a twinkling three persons sufficiently drunk to be willing at a moment's notice to fill the gaps.

Therefore it became possible for the S.S. *Strathmuir* to sail for the Gulf with her full complement as attested. To sail in the ordinary way, after handing certain dollars and cents to the boarding-house master, and putting to bed in the ordinary manner her drunken sea-boys. To sail in spite of a light loadline, which during the latter stages of the trip obviously crippled her, made O'Hagan uneasy and Lucy scared.

A ship may be too light as well as too deep ; and, as though it had become necessary to apologise for her immersion on the outward trip, Authority, now she was on the home stretch, had decided to ignore her. Too light ? What the devil does it matter ? Get her along—those are the orders issued to the Bottle-fillers.

Through gales she came triumphant, into the swelter of seas and islands so beautiful, so kind, so full of interest, that interest in her capers seemed to pass as by magic. A gale on the side of a bladder in water-ballast would have tested the *Strathmuir* very effectually here ; but the Gulf was kind, hot air trickled about her, hot puffs of wind perfumed and wonderful from those islands she passed. A gale would have kept O'Hagan busy trying to keep the *Strathmuir's* head on to it, or tail on to it—and, like an airship, like a balloon he would have twisted, teetotumed and careened before it.

A month, spent mainly in the tropics, latterly with new interests arising hour by hour, then the *Strathmuir* crept into the Texan cotton port, Galveston, and asked for advice. It came as before, a whistling chorus on tele-

phones ordering her alongside, "to move," to "start in right away," as agents were prepared to make things hum.

Lucy O'Hagan scarcely saw the great U.S.A. It was a continent of vast interest to her, peopled by men and women of her own and her husband's blood; but it remained a sealed book after thirteen thousand miles of voyaging. She saw a gleam of Galveston on one wonderful day when Den had an hour to spare, took lunch at an American restaurant, caught sight of America's trains, the hooded monsters which draw them, saw the niggers and heard their song, and that is all.

The skipper of a Dutch eel boat lying off Thames Haven sees as much of our London as the captain of a tramp sees of the city which finds him cargo.

So—fighting flies and heat and mosquitoes which never grew tired of them, they spent twelve days and nights listening to the thud of the bales which keep Lancashire spinners opulent and brokers on tenterhooks. They gladly faced the sea in exchange, even though Key West provided a fog for them and when abreast of New York there came a norther to paint their gallant homestead white. The sea rose here as is its genial fashion under the lashing of a gale; it threw white crests high over the plunging *Strathmuir*, tossed it with fine prodigality and left it there for the bitter wind to freeze and make beautiful.

Ten days of varying fortune succeeded that dressing; a little fog, some tired airs, a gale of moderate violence then the *Strathmuir* trailed her ponderous bulk, her sturdy funnel and short masts into dock at Liverpool. Five days banging ensued, Lucy got herself away from the din of it, took rooms high up in Huskisson Street and rejoined on the night which saw them thrust forth in the old style to chance what came in Channel.

Get a move on. The days are boom days. The Pampas Line is stacked with demands for cargo space! Out with you, to London, and take up the round which is yours.

A prosperous voyage at an end—but no word from McClure. Not even a message of welcome. O'Hagan had done what any other stupidity could do—that is all. He had done what any other British shipmaster could do not by rule of thumb, but by the classic art of navigation which produces by safe methods what rule of thumb produces at random.

Lucy saw but little of her husband on this trip. Again the ship was in ballast, uncomfortably bladder-like and flourishing a screw on the slightest inducement. It was December in British seas, dark, gloomy, taciturn. Sometimes fog accompanied them, sometimes drizzling rain. Sometimes the *Strathmuir* lolled along before a following breeze, sometimes danced at a flick of temper. But she strolled presently to the foot of the Reach which flows past Riverton.

She howled dismally as she moved. It was thick and a pilot marched the bridge with O'Hagan, giving scraps of news. The strikes he denounced as stupid ; the Government's latest he described as imbecile ; the green winter appalling—but he looked jolly and prosperous. Perhaps he was a friend of Mrs. Portland Lodge . . . but he knew without word from any soul on board that O'Hagan was the man who had been broken for the loss of the *Sphinx*, had heard the whispers about insobriety, knew of his residence in that charming old Chatter Town and of his straits. Puerile. O'Hagan marked time as he heard.

Lucy saw with a thrill of delight the old red roofs through the mist, and held the prodigy high so that he might nod and blink and coo his appreciation. But Denis saw it with a touch of the old misgiving, perhaps because it was a grey day, perhaps because he had pierced the pilot's defences.

A white haze hid the hills up there where stood The Deodars and all their household gods. Fog lay on the river—the thin, dank fog of the estuary which in part is smoke and in part moisture wrung from the marshes. Over there clucked the docks which had marked his anguish ; the mailships which he had scarcely dared to board, the tin-pot canteen from which he had made his exit only to hear Worsdale's advice—" If it is necessary to eat or drink when you are at the docks, carry a sandwich and a flask of cold tea. Let people see that it is tea."

Damnable ! And yet how often he had crossed that narrow stretch between his home and the farther shipping. With what hope he had come down to Riverton and shown Lucy the home which he had picked out ; how he had hung on her decision . . . and then, well, had not Riverton also seen him nearly at the end of his tether ; a strong man beaten by a sentence which the world translates into incompetence at the very least.

It was a dank day. The ship moved very slowly past

those red roofs and climbing streets. There was ample opportunity while watching the pilot to fly kites and check results. The air was soft, muggy, humid to the point of saturation—and O'Hagan was a Celt, with all the yearning vision of his race, the power of living in the past, the power, too, of seeing what is to come. He had a sensation as the ship dragged slowly through the haze, of catastrophe which he could not quite explain. It belonged to the moment. Perhaps it was the weather, perhaps the sight of his old home. He could not say what it was.

Then came a quickening. A new pilot had arrived. One apparently who lived at Erith, or Woolwich, or the Isle of Dogs and knew no gossip of tweaking Riverton. Yet he knew of O'Hagan's trial and covertly congratulated him on his victory. O'Hagan took this without challenge —but it stung. As far as he could see they all knew and pitied him. He did not require their pity. He required obedience, care, seamanship of his pilots; especially of this newcomer who was to take them along the last lap of their journey. If this glib personage, or either of his *confrères*, happened to put the *Strathmuir* ashore or did any sort of damage while in charge, O'Hagan, by the merciful decree of Authority, would be liable. That, too, is one of the advantages of being a Bottle-filler.

Very naturally, then, O'Hagan scanned him for signs other than those which usually appear with loquacity. With twenty skippers the pilot's compliment would have been accepted as the mark of a discriminating mind; but at once O'Hagan stood on stilts. He had won no victory. By the skin of his teeth he had been able during the past five months—perhaps six—to hold his own. He had earned his living, he had provided a small interlude for Lucy; but the torture he had endured while winning what he had won would have left the pilot cold!

It is all a question of temperament, of education, and O'Hagan was beginning to discover that to be sensitive at sea is a blunder.

He watched the pilot, a bird-like person who stood with a high-shouldered shrug, at the wing of the bridge. A ticklish piece of navigation lay before them. A ship is always in greater danger in narrow waters than in wide; but the pilot seemed competent. He appeared to be endowed with second sight. He said he could smell a buoy as well as some folk smell drains. He certainly found

them and passed them with an immense and overweening assurance which at length brought the *Strathmuir* to the dock gates. Then, very precise and neat he came down from the bridge, rubbing hands and ready to get his note signed.

The voyage was at an end.

In an hour the ship would be tied up, ready to take in cargo and recommence her comet-like activities. Angus was as nervous as a kitten because he, alone of all on board, would be called upon to explain the coal consumption, which he asserted was away and above all possible estimates; but O'Hagan laughed at him. He knew Angus quite as well as he was likely to know himself. It is your spendthrifts who are careless when the reckoning comes to be made; not the man who nurses his fires.

Now that they were in dock the weight seemed to have vanished from O'Hagan's mind. Quite simply this had come about. People recognised him, someone from the office appeared with a bundle of papers, and a fine show of congratulation ensued. So, for a period, O'Hagan's burden was pushed aside while he stood in contemplation of his achievements. What had he done? Nothing, plainly, very wonderful; nothing heroic, nothing in any way to lift the smudge from his papers—but, on the other hand, he had made an exceedingly prosperous round voyage.

He had quick despatch, thumping freights, small disbursements, and no damage to report. With the exception of that one man who had been pulverised, no trouble of any sort had befallen the ship.

They had been away nearly five months, during which period the Pampas Line had made a clear five thousand; O'Hagan had earned rather less than one hundred and twenty, and the second mate forty. . . .

Even his bitterest enemy could not accuse McClure, the head of the Pampas Line, of paying what his shareholders in moments of depression termed "profligate salaries."

Amidst congratulations from those who desired something at his hands, and words of welcome from others, a clerk from the office of the Pampas Line handed Captain O'Hagan a note. It was from McClure, who wrote to say he would be glad if Captain O'Hagan would make it

convenient to call at the office at eleven o'clock to-morrow, " as he found it necessary to see him."

Of course there was no possible necessity for that final touch. It was obvious McClure would desire to see the commander of the *Strathmuir*. As manager of the line he could insist on seeing him, as no doubt the world knows.

O'Hagan gritted over the phrase. He told Lucy that something was in the wind. He went farther and assured her that he knew it directly they entered the river—although in no sense could he have explained more.

Lucy had come upon him in the chart-room after the prodigy had been put to bed, and had learned the meaning of his absent demeanour, of his irritability after the delivery of the letter.

" There's something in the wind," he asserted again. " I went as far as I could with an understrapper; but he knew nothing. He only knew he might not say . . . I thought at first there might be a claim from someone for that poor devil who got washed away; but I need not have worried; the directors of the Pampas Line know how to deal with incidents of that kind. . . ."

" Den ! "

She put her arms about his neck; but they failed to soothe him, he raged on, his tone for the moment bitter.

" I have done rather well for them. They will clear a little fortune out of this five months' work. There isn't a ship of our tonnage in the London docks that will show better results than those I shall hand in—and in spite of it . . ."

" Den ! Please, please don't . . ."

" Don't ? Why not ? " His arm went round her, notwithstanding the hot return. He added, as though ashamed, " But it is true, isn't it ? "

" What is true, Den; you have told me nothing," she whispered, clinging to him.

" That I shall get the sack, oh Mem-sahib," he answered, lowering his eyes to hers.

She drew back, her cheeks on fire. She searched him swiftly, uncertain, then asked—" Why do you say that—why, why ? "

" Don't know, dearest," he said, with a queer indrawing of breath.

" Has anything been said ? " she persisted.

"Nothing definite, only McClure has . . ."

"He was kind," she interjected, "just remember . . ."

"Yes. I know. But McClure is a business man, Loo. If he thinks it is to his interest to keep me in command he will keep me—otherwise I shall be told to resign . . ."

"Did he tell you so before we started, dearest?" she whispered, her hand reaching up as though to screen him.

"Yes."

"And you wouldn't tell me?"

He shrugged over this, making light of it with the phrase—"What was the use?"

"Use!" She clung to him at the word in spite of its sting. "No—you are right there. I could have done nothing. And now I can do less . . . that is one of the prerogatives of a woman, Den—to sit still and do nothing . . . nothing, although it breaks her heart. No, dearest—I am not slating you. It *was* no use your telling me. It is no use now . . . but I am just beginning to recognise the hole I put you in by—by marrying you . . . and—and wondering what in the world I can do—to, to help you, Den. . . ."

They drew together in the dusk, up there in the chart-room, just when it seemed that events had decided to push them apart.

"I won't hear that . . . you are my wife," said Den.

"I won't say it again, oh dearest," Lucy faltered, "but it is true."

The docks had gone for a brief spell to sleep. Men outside and in the sheds were taking tea from little blue cans. Far off were the sounds of shunting trains and wailing river horns; far off their home and all talk of an encumbrance. They drew together as in the old days on the *Saladin;* as at Suez, that wonderful night when the desert lay at their feet and the world was before them. They decided to face what came together. If it brought peace—well; if it brought pain—then well again . . . provided always and for all time they kept in touch—close, close, so that nothing could tear them apart.

They decided, too, not to go to town to-night; not to take rooms out there near Hyde Park so that the prodigy might breathe fresh air; not to go to the theatre . . . but to wait; because, if that possibility suggested by Den came true, they would want every penny he had earned for commonplace things like milk and bread.

Morning came at the docks even as over greater London. The sun climbed through a smoke haze which was wonderful to consider—a red ball, dim, shimmering as it rose. Chimneys barred its disc, the short iron masts of modern ships, and funnels blotted it out; but it climbed from the blue earth and presently cooled to a white mistiness amidst the clouds. With the morning came dock labourers, breakfast, work; and at eleven o'clock O'Hagan entered the office to seek McClure.

He was taken in with the same courtesy as on that wonderful occasion when the gates were beginning to close upon him and upon Lucy. It was difficult to realise that presently he would again be compelled to watch them as they swung to.

McClure had no knowledge of these or any other gates. Success stood like a mirror to brighten him. He scarcely understood difficulty as a monetary pain; poverty, although the word in another form was constantly on his lips, the lips especially of Mrs. McClure, he did not understand. The world, the business world of shipowners was a very pleasant one. The world, in point of fact, for McClure, was exactly what he chose to make of it. And to-day O'Hagan as he entered found him suave, polite, armed *cap-à-pie* in kindliness. He rose and extended a cool hand.

"Ah," he said, "you look well and hearty, captain . . . take that chair . . . draw it a little nearer . . . rather different to the poor devils who have to look after your interests here—eh?"

McClure figured for a moment as one of the poor devils. It is an attitude easily adopted, and in the hands of an expert is efficacious. Naturally he made no allusion to the week-ends he enjoyed—Friday to Tuesday—nor the hours he spent away from the office. It was the sort of lapse anticipated by his genial salutation, yet McClure was kind.

Captain O'Hagan found a seat and admitted in even tones that he was well; but he had no words of sympathy for the poor devils. In his mind he was sure that the gates would be closed. It was no longer a question. He was sure. This was but a preliminary.

"How is Mrs. O'Hagan?" questioned McClure.

"She is quite well, sir," O'Hagan admitted.

"Enjoyed the trip I hope?"

"Indeed yes. It is a matter on which I am sure she would wish to express herself, when she has an opportunity."

"Ah!" sighed McClure.

For a short space he remained silent, studying the face which bespoke health and heartiness; then he swung slightly the swivel chair and, resting his arms, said—

"I never indulge in circumlocution. There is no sense in it between men. I can see," he added with his old precision, "that you have an inkling that the forecast I made of what might occur was correct. It was. Lloyd's have acted as I expected. I need not tell you I am sorry, for I think you will give me credit so far—and I confess that it is not my wish to add to your difficulties; but, as I warned you on your appointment, I cannot continue you in command now that the question has arisen. To be quite candid, it was the merest accident that it did not arise before you sailed . . . you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"To put the matter very bluntly, Captain O'Hagan, you are on the Black List. . . . Lloyd's differentiate against you on their policy in future. The premium I shall have to pay, if I chose to ignore Lloyd's, which I cannot do, would be considerably increased. I have, of course, large influence with my shareholders; but I doubt whether I should be able to persuade them to incur the additional expense. And—I must point out—if the question came up for discussion, I should be compelled to raise that most unfortunate matter of the *Sphinx*. . . . And they——"

As McClure lifted shoulders over this O'Hagan acknowledged that the gates were closing.

"I see your difficulty," he said slowly. "It is very plain . . . but I do not think it will be necessary to raise it if—as I understand—you wish me to send in my resignation?"

McClure acknowledged that this would be the simpler way.

"But it means that I may not do the only work I am trained to do," O'Hagan urged.

Again McClure made a gesture indicative of assent, but he seemed oppressed and, leaning forward on the arm of his chair, said—

"I should be sorry to allow you to think I am doing

this with any sort of pleasure. It is repugnant, as a matter of fact, but my hands are tied. I must talk it over with Worsdale. It is a very difficult problem. They differentiate against you at Lloyd's—merely as a business precaution. There is no hostility to you personally in their action. You are one of many all equally unfortunate—and while conditions remain as they are shipowners have no option but to acquiesce—you see that, don't you ? "

" I see that I am broken," O'Hagan made answer, his lips firm, his face alternately flushed and very pale.

" It is the last thing I desire," McClure admitted, watching. " You believe that ? "

" I understand that you acted with great kindness when you gave me command," O'Hagan acknowledged. " And I gather that nothing has happened since to make you regret it ? "

" Nothing—absolutely nothing."

" I am glad of that," O'Hagan breathed. " I went into the *Strathmuir* with my eyes open "—he leaned forward over this ; " you told me the position and I accepted it. I have no stones to throw on that head—but I have this to say, and I think it only fair you should hear it. . . ."

McClure bowed.

" I was tried," O'Hagan hissed out, " by a court which did not comprehend the questions at issue. The assessors were incompetent. They were old—sailing-ship men—one of them was deaf, one of them dozed . . . that is enough to warrant my criticism. . . .

" The *Sphinx* was lost, sir, because her deck-load broke adrift. It made her top-heavy. I was on deck till I dropped, and while I was below asleep, the mate, who was dead beat also, ran her ashore. The court said in their judgment that the *Sphinx* was seaworthy. I say definitely that no ship which carries great weights on her upper deck is seaworthy. . . . Men are killed by these deck-loads. Ships are lost through them—and we who command, if we happen to be saved, are compelled to stand our trial before people who know nothing of the sea. That is not justice. I was suspended. I served my time "—he threw the phrase out with an intensity which compelled McClure to glance round—" and when my ticket is restored to me I find I am blacklisted. . . ."

He rose from his chair and stood swaying slightly as he spoke, one hand outstretched.

" If that is justice," he said deliberately, " then I have done with England. If that is the law, then I must seek elsewhere for a means of pursuing my calling. Australia perhaps, Canada—Saigon, some remote spot in the East where they know nothing of the Black List and care less. But it is not justice which compels me to get out of the country. . . . For two pins I would not go out—I would stay and fight it—fight it, Mr. McClure, so that shipowners and Government and Lloyd's may understand that you may not blacklist a man unless he is a sot, a blackguard, a devil if you choose—plainly and visibly before the world. . . ."

He passed his hand across his dry lips while McClure stared, astonished at the man's force.

" You know what subornation is ? " he questioned. " So do I to-day. When I stood on trial I did not. I had never heard of it. I didn't think a white man could play it so low. But Sharum did it. Sharum and his witnesses lied. They lied knowing they lied. They lied as only cowards and devils will lie—and one day, please God ! I'll bring men to see that they lied. . . ."

He picked up his hat and stick and stood ready to go. McClure watched, silent under this lashing. He was unused to it. He resented it at all events in manner.

" You were kind to me, sir," O'Hagan added more softly, " when I was in a devilish tight place—and I wish to thank you. You set the clock going for the pair of us —and kept it going for six—nearly eight months. I shall not forget that . . . but "—he leaned forward emphasizing the point—" now it stops again."

" If," he said with the old ringing challenge, " Lloyd's are to discriminate against men in my position, Lloyd's should see that the courts are clean. This is a sentence of—of—starvation for me." He stumbled, moved towards the door, and suddenly turned holding it wide. " Even your criminals are fed," he launched upon that quiet room.

Then in a white heat of passion he made his way into the street and McClure returned to his chair.

" Rather a firebrand," he commented as he sat.

That night O'Hagan's resignation was dealt with by the secretary of the Pampas Line. In a neatly typed letter he begged to accept it.

Phase the Fourth

Expiation

CHAPTER I

PETER WITTERSPOON

I love you, dear, there is no rue,
  It matters nothing what they say ;
You stand by me, I'll stand by you,
  And all our work is play.

I have but you, you have but me,
  We never yet succumbed to pain ;
I'd give what's left to give of me
  To hear you laugh again.

You are my soul. I am your slave,
  I would not alter that a breath ;
God gave you me, He'll make me brave,
  I'm yours, all yours till death.

LONDON even in the dark days of January can be as pleasant as any other great city in the world for those with a full purse ; but for those on the edge of poverty, or those who find themselves debarred work, it is cruel with the cold malignity of the Arctic.

The wind was easterly and a thin fog lay over the great city. About the streets abutting on the parks the air was scarcely denser than that which trickled over the marshland below Riverton ; but patches of yellow clung to the city as in the older and less strenuous days. Fenchurch Street, the Monument, Leadenhall Market and all that maze of streets and passages which connect them, were lighted already at two o'clock.

The new offices of Sharums, Limited, stood midway down Longman Avenue, a winding lane running north and south, which sometimes gets a glimpse of the sun at noon and sometimes for days together never sees its shadows. In spite of blurred windows and grey fronts dripping moisture Sharums hummed content. Its windows were no dirtier than others in the City. The narrow pavements which bordered it were as well squeegeed as others ; its portion of the brown incubus was no denser than that which lay elsewhere ; its share of the blue-faced brigade quite normal.

Hawkers stood there as everywhere. The loafers and known mendicants were not a whit brisker or more miserable than their brothers of St. Paul's Churchyard, Queen's Road or the Grove. Business men, clerks and messengers, threaded swiftly to and fro this path of industrialism. The miserable by-products of that same industrialism whined, displayed toys or bootlaces, their hurts or their hopes, and stamped drearily their sodden feet.

A weary voice droned at the end of a passage to the accompaniment of an accordion—

> "Who's for the Shore, brothers,
> Who's for the Shore ——"

with the slow intensity of one chewing the cud of failure. No one heeded him.

Denis O'Hagan came down the street, stood a moment to stare at the office of Sharums, Limited, and passed on. Fifteen minutes later Lucy O'Hagan walked the same way.

Sharum lounged at his ease beside a writing table in his room. On his left a fire burned cheerily in a tiled grate. The door opened and he turned to see a slight, keen man entering. This was Peter Witterspoon, the dandy financier who had set Sharum on his legs and Leadenhall Street by the ears.

He was clean-shaven, dark and very alert—immensely alive. And he was the son of an eminent pill manufacturer who had left a fortune in "millions." No expense had been spared in turning out young Witterspoon. Harrow began the polishing process, Oxford and the Bar finished it. He had no use for pills and he knew by instinct a business man when he saw him. He had, as may be gauged, a long purse.

When he "chucked" the Bar he took to the wealthy man's amusements with avidity. He travelled, hunted, shot big game; flirted in India and on liners, on his yacht and in Paris. At the moment he was engaged on this "spec." in shipping which seemed to be turning out trumps. Three years ago he met Sharum in a deal which resulted in something like cent. per cent. profit. Witterspoon approved that sort of thing. He said it was the bread of life to him—and perhaps it was. His nose told tales, so did his keen, black eyes, his wavy dark hair.

Outside in the fog derelicts sold laces for the bread of

life; inside Sharums they employed capital at cent. per cent., if possible, to the same end.

In London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Bristol, business was booming. The shipyards hummed and there were not enough steamers to go round. After a period of such stagnation as statistics may prove, a boom had set in and shipowners were coming to their own. New firms were leaping to the front, damned by the old. An organiser's game, it was termed by those who rolled in profits—cheese-paring, loss of efficiency, undermanning, overloading by those Bottle-Fillers who carried out the game.

But Witterspoon knew nothing of this—he only knew a business man when he saw him. He asked no questions of Sharum or any of his underlings. Underlings as a matter of detail did not exist in the cosmos of Mr. Peter Witterspoon—and yet he was a kindly soul, with definite hopes and beliefs.

The door snapped behind him and he advanced with the usual salutation—staccato, exclamatory,—

"Hallo! Caught you napping, eh? No wonder . . . weather enough to choke a carburettor—what? Any news?"

Sharum glanced at a roll of papers which lay before him on the table.

"Any quantity."

"Passable?"

"Speaking generally—quite good. I should like to be able to put my finger on a few more boats . . . but they aren't on the market."

"Bad as that?"

"*Good* as that," Sharum corrected, nodding.

"Capital! Well—I'm rather thinking of running over to Paris for a fortnight. . . . Decided to go last night. Checked this morning, by Jove. Suppose I can manage it, eh?"

"While there's a wire," Sharum shrugged.

"Good . . . thinking as a matter of fact of having a bit of a splash. . . . How do we stand? Don't want to break the bank you know—roughly—now—what are we rolling in?"

Sharum reached for cigars and cigarettes, rose and pulled a chair near. "Sit down," he said. "We can't talk business like this. Smoke?"

Witterspoon took a cigar, Sharum did the same, then each lighted and sat back to enjoy life as they made it.

"I hear," said Witterspoon, "that the Pampas people have returned their capital since the boom started . . . rather good, that, eh?"

Sharum twisted his cigar, withdrew it and said through the smoke—"Not so bad."

"You are not going to tell me you can beat it?"

"Roughly?"

"Yes—just an idea to be going on with."

"A thousand per month, all round. Clear. Thirty bottoms." *

Witterspoon gazed through half-closed eyes at the calm lips which announced these figures. He made a rapid calculation and said with lifted chin—

"That runs into three hundred and sixty thousand, my friend?"

The friend nodded. He could afford to be *nonchalant.*

"Can't last at that pace?" Witterspoon surmised, twisting his cigar with delicate touch.

"I think we have seen the best . . . but there is a good run to come."

"Understand," Witterspoon tossed back, "I don't want to be left in the thing."

The thing in question was chartering and owning British steamers, loading them, finding their crews, paying them. It was the thing which kept Sharums employed; clerks with their noses to the desks, messengers threading byeways, telephones buzzing—and at the docks crowds of frayed men within hail of a ganger whom they termed vicariously, hating him, the Bloke and God Almighty.

"I'll take everything over as it stands," Sharum replied in his quick fashion, "when you tell me you are tired. That do?"

"Quite."

Witterspoon's eyes travelled round the room. A few fine engravings hung on the walls. There was little to suggest an office. The furniture of old oak shone as though Sharums had discovered the lost trick of glaze. In the centre of a Jacobean press stood a piece of Delft—blue upon brown, the artist's soul laid bare.

* Thirty vessels.

Witterspoon came back to the man sitting quietly before him, his legs stretched to the fire.

"Rather a change from up north," he said lightly.

"The chance of a lifetime," Sharum acquiesced.

"Do you never make mistakes?" Witterspoon pressed.

"Oh, yes."

"You don't advertise them, anyway. Clear of that bother with the *Sphinx* yet?"

"No."

"One of your mistakes, eh?"

"The only one I remember," Sharum nodded.

"Man in it called O'Hagan, wasn't there?"

"Yes—and another called Barlow. Wish I'd never seen them."

"Go on. I'm interested," said Peter Witterspoon. "For half an hour I'm going to laze."

"It may take ten minutes." Sharum reached for the financial section of the *Times*, opened it and pointed to a paragraph which he gave his friend to read.

Witterspoon put up an eyeglass, and tucked the black ribbon which held it behind his ear.

"'*Casa Blanca*,'" he read, "'London, May 20th, for Valparaiso. Boat found in 50° 45′S. 66° 50′W.'" He returned the paper, shook down his glass and said—"Greek to me. What is it? Belong to us? And why fifty guineas per cent.?"

"She belongs to Chile—but I shall have to make good any loss my cousin makes on her."

"Yes—but what is it?"

"Tug, built here to the order of some firm in Valparaiso—and the mistake I made was in allowing her to sail in charge of this chap Barlow, a man I knew to be a fool. . . ."

"Afraid you've got a soul after all," Witterspoon commented.

"It doesn't worry me," Sharum waived, airily brandishing his cigar. "Sailormen don't catch me often—but here was a case of a man with three children, wife, and mother no doubt somewhere in the background, all of whom were on the point of starvation owing to the loss of the *Sphinx*—one of my boats in the old days. . . ."

"You thought it cheaper to wink than to denounce, eh? Good man," Witterspoon commented.

"I did not, I admit, wish to reopen the whole question.

This fellow was mate of the *Sphinx* when she was lost. He and his skipper, O'Hagan, were tried and were suspended. I had a lot of trouble in the matter. These two fools went so far as to try to saddle me with their burden. They said the *Sphinx* was unseaworthy, by God! and I had to use all my influence to quash that . . ."

"Naturally," Witterspoon interjected, and added in his quizzical vein, "And was she?"

"She was as sound as this table!" Sharum thumped out, striking it.

"Good. I take your word for it. Don't know anything about it and don't want to. . . . Well, what has the *Casa Blanca* idiot done?"

"Lost her as far as I can read it."

"Where?"

"Somewhere between the Magellans and Falkland Islands, it seems."

"A tug—down there!" Witterspoon lifted his brows over this.

"Panama isn't open yet; how else could he get?" Sharum questioned in return.

"Couldn't, of course. Poor devil . . . well, and where do you come in?"

"My cousin is an underwriter," Sharum reminded.

"I know. And this thing hits him, eh? Rough luck! No chance for her at all, I suppose?"

"Devilish little. The 'doctors' rate her at fifty per cent."

"So I see. Well, who found the wreckage or whatever it is that has turned up?"

"One of the Pacific liners brought in her boat—and announced the fact. She will go to ninety guineas or so and then get posted. That is all we shall ever hear of—her," Sharum said in his growling undertone. "The only thing that annoys me," he went on, "is that I did not do my duty by the Association. I allowed feeling to intervene. That was a mistake. The fellow shipped in a false name and was in touch with his skipper to the last—the pair supposed they hoodwinked me. Me, by the Lord! You may be sure," he added, after this outburst, "I shall not slip twice in the same rut."

Witterspoon laughed aloud, slapping his thigh. "Got on your nerves, eh? Jove! I thought . . ."

"These two did me more damage," Sharum insisted,

" than I supposed any sailorman could manage. Unseaworthy mind ! You don't seem to appreciate that brick ; but it's the sort that hits pretty hard these days. There's so much rubbish talked about it. O'Hagan should have known better than to use it. He seems to be another of those chaps who can control neither their ships nor their tongues. . . ."

" Who is that ? "

" O'Hagan."

Witterspoon withdrew his cigar and, staring over lifted hands, said—" O'Hagan—I seem to know that name somehow. Incompetent too ? "

" They took him on at the Pampas Line ; but I hear he is discharged."

" Wife and family, I suppose ? "

Sharum shrugged over this, enjoying his cigar. Witterspoon sent a ring of smoke ceilingwards and said—

" Well—and what are you going to do with *him* ? "

" Fight him," Sharum decided, bristling, " if he makes it necessary."

And again Witterspoon commented in his airy fashion—" Poor devil ! "

He rose, crossed the room, and stood examining a beautiful engraving of old London with the Thames and Tower in the foreground. He put up his glass, read the name of " your humble and obedient servant " who had etched it, stepped back and said—

" Care to part with that ? "

" Guess not."

" Hum ! Know too much ! Well—I'm off for an hour or so. I have an appointment here presently and will look in before I go west. . . . *Au revoir.*"

The door cushioned on the valve behind him as Sharum turned to his letters.

Longman Avenue was dingier an hour later, colder, rawer, more given over to sudden eruptions of wind-driven paper, smuts, and the chant of those who sold toys. But for the lamps it would have been quite dark, and they glowed like dim moons seen through aureoles.

At four o'clock the City begins to show signs that the men who inhabit it sleep elsewhere. The big-wigs move off to catch trains or climb into the cars which await them. Others, less happy, or less wealthy, make a bee-line for

tea and dominoes—fifteen minutes interval before going back to their ledgers. For the clerk-brigade remains to add and subtract, to carry over, and to balance long after the majority of principals have vanished.

But Sharum was not of the majority. Golf, week-ends, river trips scarcely appealed to him now. He was out to win money, fame at the hands of the richest community of business men in the world, and the hive he commanded hummed behind closed doors. He was there to tap the boom while it existed, to run his ships while freights showed a profit; and to lay them up in tiers, *sans* crew, when that was no longer possible.

That was one of the results of what he termed organisation. It is also one of the reasons why embryo Bottle-fillers shake their heads at the sea—but this he did not consider.

As half past four tolled on the chimes of a hidden church, from the curve of Longman Avenue a woman appeared walking quickly and examining the grim frontages for the sign she required. Lucy O'Hagan came here once more, her heart beating alternately in hope and fear. She was bracing for an ordeal. She had already undergone the scrutiny of a messenger, several clerks, and the cashier of the Pampas Line; had heard it explained, after her name had been handed, on a slip of limp paper, from one to another, that Mr. McClure was not at the office. The messenger believed he had gone home, the cashier fancied he had run round to his club, the clerks were unanimous in the opinion that he left at three o'clock.

Lucy discovered bias in this general head-shaking. These understrappers had pierced her identity and were acting on instructions. She recognised now that McClure was a very busy man who never saw people without an appointment—and, said the cashier in his fatherly manner, some indication of the nature of a caller's business. The man looked like a doctor, and Lucy heard him say—"In self-defence this is essential, otherwise, you see, the chief's very valuable time would be frittered away—you see that, don't you? Abso-lu-tely frittered."

Of course Mrs. O'Hagan saw, but she remembered that this difficulty was only disclosed when the staff had become acquainted with her name. She came from the offices of the Pampas Line biting her lips at the indiscretion she had displayed. They were kindly enough, suave, apologetic, but they had no intention of permitting Mrs.

O'Hagan within the doors of that holy of holies which once had sheltered Den. She came down Longman Avenue now shaking off assistance. The pauper tribe not yet vanished to their lairs scented a novice and would have earned pennies had she shown signs of uncertainty. But she held on. She had learned exactly where to find these offices and had set out " to see what she could do."

She was like Amaryllis come to the land where dollars are earned to dress her and her cousins of the town. Come, not for a Stock Exchange tip, but to plead the cause of a husband. Come, not as one of the new fighters, but to learn in the old way what the Black List is, why it exists, how "inimical to business" it would be if this " deterrent " were removed. True, she had no knowledge of business; knew nothing of the necessity which brings us all eventually to the seat of custom. She knew only that Den had come home three nights ago " with the black rage on him " as men say of his compatriots when they desire to emphasise misery.

Den with the black rage on him, cursing his luck—it had come to this at length—and wondering when his Appeal would come on, was a sufficiently pitiable specimen of the Bottle-filler. Lucy scarcely recognised her husband. He had gone back to the profitless business of seeking work in the City—so that he might be at hand to prosecute that beast Sharum, clear himself as Worsdale desired, and at the same time earn enough to pay his railway fares. Poor Den! Poor Lucy! The two stood now on the threshold of what the Law might ordain. Simply, unknowingly on that.

Lucy found the door without removing her veil. It was plain to all beholders. Sharums Limited in black and red lay across a brass plate which spanned two doors. She could have seen it in the dark.

Lucy entered and discovered, just within an inquiry box, a commissionaire wearing medals. Among them was one for the Egyptian Campaign, 1898; and to him she said with the *sang-froid* of a soldier's daughter—" Omdurman ? "

The grizzled warrior saluted instantly.

" Yes, lady—and the Flotilla."

" My father was there too—Major Faulkner—Lord K.'s staff—what regiment were you in ? "

" Gordons, lady."

"Ah!"

Then after a swift glance at the partition, Lucy said—"Is Mr. Sharum in?"

"Yes, lady . . . what name shall I . . ."

"Mr. Sharum would not know it—just say that someone wishes to speak with him for a few minutes."

The man was moving away on his errand when his chief emerged ready for the street. That halted him. He stood erect, his hand raised in salute, and said—

"A lady, sir, to see you."

Sharum paused and moved his hat while Lucy at once drew near.

"Mr. Sharum?" she asked, her eyes acknowledging triumph.

"Yes?"

"May I speak with you a few minutes?"

Sharum glanced at his watch, hesitated in a fashion no man had seen, and said rather brusquely—"Yes, I suppose so . . . come this way, please."

Apparently he had noticed that in her eyes which told him refusal might produce a scene. He disliked scenes, especially on the threshold of his office.

He led the way to his room, switched on the lights, and as the commissionaire closed the door said—"Pray take a seat." Then he touched a button and faced his visitor with the air of a man who said "you wish to see me—well, here I am, enthroned, ready with witnesses—go ahead and do your worst."

"My name is O'Hagan."

Lucy broke the silence with this bombshell as she lifted her veil. At the same instant a man entered the room and approached Sharum. He bent down, speaking very quietly, so quietly that only the drone of his voice reached Lucy. Sharum replied in the same tone, the man moved quietly away, then Sharum looked up to say—

"I beg your pardon. You were saying . . .?"

"That my name is O'Hagan. Captain O'Hagan, who was in the *Sphinx*"—she spoke in clear, well modulated tones—"is my husband, and I have come to see if I can persuade you to remove his name from the Black List."

Sharum listened courteously. He appeared suave, collected, quite indifferent either to the fate of O'Hagan or of the Black List; but like McClure, he recognised a

pretty woman when he saw one. This one was beautiful. A bother, that. It is always more pleasant to help a beautiful woman than to flout her. Yet that must be the upshot here. O'Hagan! The very name stank in this man's nostrils. Why the devil couldn't he fight his own battles? What have shipowners to do with the women who are fools enough to marry skippers and mates . . . and how in the world had O'Hagan managed to get hold of this gem?

So ran thought behind the impassive mask of this man, whose skippers were busy rolling in profits for their master to the tune of a thousand a month. He scarcely moved in his chair to answer her.

"I am in no sense responsible for the position," he said. "The Black List, if it exists at all, except in the imagination of singularly susceptible people, I take it exists at Lloyd's. . . . Shipowners at all events are not concerned with it. . . ."

"Shipowners," she reminded him, "refuse to take officers who are on the Black List."

Sharum extended his hands.

"Possibly. I cannot speak to the truth of that—or the reverse."

"Mr. Sharum," Lucy leaned forward, her voice pleading where she could have slain, "it is impossible for you to persuade me that you do not know that my husband is on the Black List. He commanded the *Sphinx*. The *Sphinx* belonged to you. He was suspended for her loss and as a consequence of that suspension his name is on the list of men who are not considered fit for command. That is unfair. You know he is fit. He commanded in the Pampas Line, but Mr. McClure refuses to allow him to remain—while his name is on that list. That is ruin to him—and I have come to ask you to use your influence to get it removed. . . ."

Sharum's answer was short and explicit.

"I have no influence at all in this matter."

"But you will not refuse to see those who have?"

"Sorry as I am to disappoint you—I must decline," Sharum answered at once.

"But—but it is killing my husband . . . breaking him up. Don't you see, that if you take away his livelihood in this way, something dreadful will happen?"

"Again, in all sincerity," came quietly from Sharum's

lips, " I must put in a disclaimer there. I am not responsible for Captain O'Hagan's position."

" Then who is ? "

" That is not for me to say even had I the necessary knowledge. And," Sharum suffered indignation to creep in here, his lips drew new lines, " I think, if you will consider the matter dispassionately, you will acknowledge that I am the last—the very last—to whom you should address your appeal."

" I don't agree there ; but tell me your version," Lucy urged.

" Captain O'Hagan acted very badly in this matter. I am not alluding to the loss of my ship, but to his conduct at the Inquiry. He accused us of sending to sea a vessel laden so that she was unseaworthy. The whole argument was resolved upon that. Unseaworthy. That is a monstrous and libellous accusation to make." He shook this out with vigour. It seemed to oppress him. " I have no words strong enough to condemn such action on the part of a British shipmaster."

" My husband tells me it is the new Act which makes ships unseaworthy."

" Very well—let him fight the Act," Sharum scoffed.

" How can he—you know that only a rich man can fight an Act of Parliament. . . . Surely, surely you have no animosity in the matter. You are too big to be affected by a small thing like this. What is it to you whether my husband is at work or at play ? I refuse to believe you have any desire to harm him. It is impossible . . ."

She leaned forward, speaking in a tense whisper—

" And remember what lies behind. I, too, am hurt if my husband is unable to work. You see that, don't you . . . and there is Baba. Is it any use telling you what it must mean to all of us if we are driven to the wall ? Oh ! I don't believe you have seen it from this point of view, I can't—or you would never tell me he must fight an Act of Parliament. He can't fight it ! "

" Then he should leave it alone," came bluntly in comment on this. " If ships are made unseaworthy by the new Rule he is under no compulsion to sail in them."

Lucy shrank back in her chair. Sharum's antagonism had become plainer with his defence. She felt that it was useless to continue argument with one who fenced in this fashion. Useless to plead, useless to beg. She would

be compelled to strike. She had come there prepared, if necessary, to call on Witterspoon for aid; but still she hesitated. She scarcely knew why. With a sudden spring of impatience she said—

"You accused my husband of drunkenness. . . ."

"And if we did, was it not true?"

"It was false, and you knew it."

"I am sorry to seem impolite," Sharum hit back. "We acted on information supplied by our agents."

"It was false. Your witnesses were paid to say what they said. . . ."

Sharum leaned forward in his chair, tapping the table irritably. "Do you accuse me of wilfully bringing a bogus charge against your husband?" he asked.

"That is a question I leave to your conscience—if you have one," Lucy retorted. But at the back of her mind she knew that she was losing . . . that she would be compelled to call for help.

"I suppose"—she moved tangentwise here, with the calm intensity of a woman stung to her soul by the fact that she had pleaded without effect; pleaded, and had her words flung back at her—"I suppose you consider yourself a business man?"

Sharum refused to be drawn in this fashion. He sat there ill at ease, hectored, as he put it, by a woman, the wife of one of his ex-skippers if you please, who it seemed said enough, or not enough, he scarcely knew which, to warrant an action for libel. And yet—at whose cost? He stamped and remained silent.

"I am thankful I know very little," Lucy resumed, "but I am told that people who persuade their captains to invest money in vessels which are mortgaged to the hilt, without advising them they are mortgaged, are running the risk of being charged with malfeasance." She repeated, looking down on the sallow face of this personage who had the ordering of hundreds in his hands, "Malfeasance is a criminal offence. I heard it applied to your methods and I looked it up."

Sharum scarcely moved, although he bowed before her strength. He would have liked to say—"What in the world do you know about criminal law, little witch," but produced this phrase instead—"If Captain O'Hagan considers himself aggrieved in that matter, his remedy is plain."

"You know your company was bankrupt when you invited him to invest."

"I offered him command on certain terms which he accepted," Sharum explained.

"You took five hundred pounds out of his pocket and then turned him adrift," Lucy tossed back.

Sharum rose to end this.

"I think," he said, "that nothing is to be gained by recrimination. If your husband . . ."

"You attacked Captain O'Hagan," Lucy challenged at once, her words ringing in the still room. "You sneered at the terrible position in which he finds himself. You . . ."

Sharum lifted his hand and his voice together.

"Pray do not excite yourself," he urged, his one aim now the pacification of this outspoken young woman who showered charges on a nature which never would respond to passion; which would remain cold, polished as the staid old furniture with which he was surrounded, calm as the engravings on his walls.

"Excite myself!" Lucy's mocking laugh rang out. She was very able to protect herself, very flexile, bright, strong; but she knew that she must call in help. Obey her aunt. Ask someone else to hammer in her arguments. "One does not allow excitement to interfere," she said. "Perhaps you prefer that I should see Mr. Witterspoon?"

She watched closely as she fired this charge; but Sharum, in spite of his astonishment, gave no sign that he felt, feared or hesitated. At once he answered—

"If you think Mr. Witterspoon can give you a more patient hearing than I have done I will ask him to meet you here."

As Sharum played that shot he saw Lucy in his mind's eye go down before him. He supposed she had learned of the connection which existed between Sharum and the dandy financier; not that she knew him—and as a matter of fact strove to outplay his antagonist as he would a man. But Sharum had been so fully occupied while climbing the ladder of commerce that he had not found time to study that new force which was climbing beside him—the modern woman. He was aware of course, in a remote way, that the force had arrived; but he had no knowledge of the girl organizer who, under a delightful *naïveté*, conceals knowledge wide and vigorous as a man, and with wonderful insight speaks and acts upon it.

"Thanks," said this audacity, "don't bother. I wrote for an appointment. Mr. Witterspoon will meet me."

Sharum, more sallow than before, questioned—"Where?"

"I should have said here," Lucy smiled, then added, "if it is convenient to you."

"Pray do not consider that," Sharum bowed. "My ignorance prompted the question. I was not aware you knew Mr. Witterspoon."

In his mind as he rose and left the room, he anathematised this mixing up of persons and causes in one bowl. O'Hagan, Witterspoon, Madame, the lost *Sphinx*, the Black List—himself. Good heavens! And this the result of half an hour's interview with a woman! He was angry. He would in future face a scene even in the vestibule rather than an interview. He damned the bronzed warrior who saluted him, called for his secretary and returned.

He had made this small pilgrimage solely to cover his annoyance. He was angry in the still, deadly fashion of his kind when he came back. And there stood Lucy examining the engraving which Witterspoon had admired. She made no excuse but presently caught sight of a piece of Delft which might have given her a hint of the leanings of this man with the sallow, broad brow who ruled here. But the matter which occupied Lucy lay in the field of anticipation. She had not seen Peter Witterspoon for a long time. Years, she decided, when she considered it—years! She did not know what Mrs. Faulkner had said to him, only that he was connected with Sharum and should be seen. She had formed no plan, but moved in the dark very much as a novice moves pieces in chess. She knew that it was the only means she had of trying to help Den, of showing him that after all marriage was not entirely a handicap.

The silence was complete, yet Lucy gathered "that man" had returned and wondered what he was doing. She did not know that the clerk who accompanied him was the same as he who had appeared at the beginning of this interview. She did not know that at this moment he was transcribing the shorthand report of every sentence that had been spoken—and, had she known it she would have smiled.

What a deadly silence! The still malignity of it appalled her. It was the *mise en scène* demanded by plotters—not even a clock-tick to disturb them. She wondered what "that man" was doing. She could not see. The room held no mirrors. It was horrid standing in that fashion at all events, and the man would be criticising the hang of her gown. Hateful! She shivered with the notion, and the eyes of those two pierced her through. She was on the verge of panic—for no reason, she told herself. Yet it was there. She wanted to scream . . . for the first time in the course of that interview she felt dizzy, unable to stand still, unable to control her limbs. Then, as though "that man" had diagnosed her condition, she heard a voice saying very calmly—

"Won't you sit down?"

Sit down! She desired to hurl the words back, to treat them with scorn—and yet, for some unknown reason her lips formed acquiescence—"Oh, thanks very much. Do you think Mr. Witterspoon will be very long?"

"I expect him every minute, and have left word for him to come here," Sharum replied.

With that Lucy accepted the inevitable, turned and sat once more, gaining strength with the effort. She saw the room less dizzily; saw the clerk advance to offer her a newspaper . . . as though she desired to read; as though she could command her pulses sufficiently to examine one line. . . . Still, she took it from him, said thank you, and presently became absorbed in a paragraph, marked in double lines by a blue pencil, which stated—

"*Casa Blanca.* May 20th for Valparaiso. Boat found in 50° 45′ S. 66° 50′ W. 50 guineas."

A message from the sea lay to her hand. A message from Jimmy Barlow . . . Jimmy—had Den seen this? What did it mean?

She moved softly considering it.

It was the only passage marked on that page. Why was it marked? A shivering touch, cold, indefinite, ran down her spine. Had they given her this thing to frighten her? What did it mean? She leaned forward striving to pierce the distance, and saw Jimmy Barlow as he sat pretending to make merry in the *Strathmuir's* cabin. She remembered Den had told her of a dream . . . What boat had been found? Why was it found . . . and, and what of Jimmy Barlow?

With puzzled brain and troubled eyes she searched the paper and found a heading which offered—" Reinsurance Rates," as an index. Nothing more illuminative. Why had they given it to her to read ?—" Was Jimmy Barlow lost ? "

The words fell in a whisper which no one heard. She saw those two bending over a task, silent, like the dead. She wanted to cry out, to ask someone—but her lips remained closed. They seemed dry. She moistened them with her tongue and again that shivering touch ran down her spine. She was cold and hot in a breath. Cold and hot—the room a tomb, soundless, void, but for those two scribbling, like people bereft of speech.

The strain of this meeting had been terrible, but the silence appalled. She lifted her hand, pushed back her veil, and found voice with—

" What does this mean . . . why don't you answer me ? " pointing tragically at the paper . . . then the door opened. Heaven opened and Peter Witterspoon came in with a clang. He tossed aside hat, gloves, stick, and advanced holding out both hands—Oh ! he was good to look upon.

" You here first ! I thought I should never see you again ! Jove ! what luck ! And I've kept you. . . . Been wondering what in the world had become of you ever since Simla. . . ."

He caught her hands—" You ran away then ! " he laughed and approached so near that it seemed that he intended to kiss her cheek ; but Lucy swerved and he transferred the attention to her hands. He pressed them to his lips, then looked up—oh ! it was good to remember.

Lucy stood flushed and in trouble ; but he did not see.

" How in the world did you get to know I was here ? " He cried out, " Sharum ! "—he jerked back seeking by a gesture to draw him near—" This is Miss Faulkner . . . I met her in India . . . wish to heaven we were there now." He was alternately lifting and letting fall Lucy's hands as he rattled on, and in the midst of it her eyes filled. She tried to cry out ; but no words were evident —only the choked utterance of one on the edge of tears.

" Hallo ! " said Peter Witterspoon, " anything wrong ? "

Lucy nodded, her eyes dim.

" Take me home," she whispered.

"Now?"

"At once, please."

"Ill?"

"No—no; but I must get away from here immediately, and ——" she faced Sharum, who stood annoyed by this turn of the wheel.

"What has happened to the *Casa Blanca?*" she demanded.

"As far as one can say at the moment," he bowed, "she is missing."

"Missing—are you sure?"

Witterspoon took the paper she held, scanned it and turned on Sharum.

"What in the world did you show her that for?" he questioned sharply.

"It seemed likely," Sharum gave back, "that Mrs. O'Hagan would be interested."

"*Mrs. O'Hagan!*"

Sharum nodded.

With Lucy on his arm Witterspoon moved to the door.

CHAPTER II

"I TRUSTED YOU"

THIS could not go on. And yet, if Lucy was to help Den she must see it through, twist it to aid her, compel consideration. Compel! Even as she passed through the vestibule an assurance of the futility of this fell upon her. Witterspoon had taken possession of her. By sheer force and masculinity he stood over her in the manner of protector. In a moment of panic she had asked him to escort her. Now, if she could have shaken him off without injury to the cause she had marked as essential, she would have done so. Impossible! She shook her head over it. She must be kind—walk, as her aunt had suggested, with promises which mean nothing.

That brought with a rush of contending thoughts the question—"What has Aunt Mary said to this man that he acted with such warmth?" He used to be, what is known as a "rather decent sort." Their relations in India had been of a mild jocularity; nor had he ever led her to suppose he loved her. . . . With a hot flush on cheek and brow Lucy stumbled as she walked, and instantly recognised the pressure of his protecting arm.

It was dark—but lamps which made light the way they traversed refused altogether to pierce the gloom which clouded her. Time alone would do that. Time the juggler!

"And so," said Peter Witterspoon's voice, "you are Mrs. O'Hagan!"

"Yes. Didn't you know?"

"What is he?" came at once, pushing away her question.

"Captain——" she halted over this.

"Army?"

"Merchant Service."

"The O'Hagan that man Sharum was telling me of? No!" The negative came with a rush suggesting the absurd.

"I expect so. He—he commanded the *Sphinx* when she was lost," Lucy faltered.

Peter Witterspoon's arm seemed to press more closely on Lucy's hand. He drew a long breath. It was as though he sighed.

They stood at last in the gloom of Longman Avenue. Beside the curb one of the new racing cars throbbed with an energy which refused sleep. Lucy saw it with a gasp of delight.

"Not yours?" she whispered.

"Every inch of her. Jump in."

"Why?" she drew back, uncertain.

"I am going to take you home," he returned.

"You can't—in that," she objected. "It's—it's down in the East End. . . ."

He whistled softly.

"Nevertheless, I shall take you," he threw back. "You asked. I promised. Jump in."

She desired to fight this; but saw the commissionaire standing there holding the door for her to enter. She could not argue before the medals of an Egyptian campaign—besides, Peter Witterspoon was putting on gauntlets ready for the road—She took the seat assigned to her, felt the warmth of that magnificent rug which had lain on the commissionaire's arm and lay back sighing. It was glorious to surrender entirely to this beautiful toy, to feel that one need no longer bother, that soon one would be at home. She closed her eyes.

And presently the throb increased. She felt a jerk or two, then they moved down the shades and came into a wider street leading towards the Bank. Their advent was heralded by a strange horn note, a sound which Lucy decided at once was like the cry of a sick elephant.

Witterspoon leaned towards her as they came to a crossing.

"What address?" he asked.

"Forty-five, Bearsted Road," she gave in response.

"Where in the world is that?"

"East End. A turning off East India Dock Road. . . ."

"Don't know it!" Peter Witterspoon hummed; "don't know it . . . let it go cram!"

They slid into the traffic moving west, coughing out strange explosive sounds which shook the car.

"No silencer," Witterspoon commented, noting in the

glare of a lamp her air of strained attention. "She's a beauty when one has room, or on a racing track. No good for the streets."

"Do you often bring her into the City, then?"

"No. . . . Fact is I was on my way to Paris when I got your note. Couldn't change at the last minute. Your aunt told me you would write. Paris can wait."

She pushed this aside as they halted behind a constable's outstretched arm and said—"Do you go very much to the City?"

"When Sharum can't or won't use the telephone," he said, "I have to go."

"You hate it, I expect?"

"It pays," he laughed. "Pays, pays . . . what would you have?"

"And it gives you influence, a thing you love, Mr. Witterspoon, if I know anything of men."

"It counts sometimes," he smiled, looking into her eyes.

"And I suppose Mr. Sharum would do anything you chose to ask?" she pressed, the crux of her excursion to the City at length in view.

Witterspoon shrugged over this—"To some extent, perhaps. Fact is I don't interfere at all. . . . I finance a bit and keep out of it."

"But you *could* persuade him if you wished to do so?" she insisted, when he broke in with—

"If I can be of the smallest service to Miss Faulkner . . . I beg your pardon . . . to Mrs. O Hagan, depend upon it I will do all I know."

"But it will only be indirectly for me. . . ."

"Never mind. Tell me. . . ."

"I want you to help my husband," she faltered here. "He is broken . . . we are all broken by Mr. Sharum's action after the loss of the *Sphinx*. . . ."

Witterspoon whistled softly, recalling the shipowner's denunciation of O'Hagan and all he stood for. Then the constable moved from before them giving the passing signal and the car leaped on. Without glancing in her direction, all his attention concentrated on his machine he said—"Tell me all about it . . . I will see what can be done. That do?"

She nodded, her face on fire, hope racing fast in her brain.

"I hate to bother people with—with our affairs," she

said as they swerved past great drays standing in Cannon Street. "It is so much finer to fight one's own battles—but here, you see, we are up against interests too big for us to tackle alone. You see," she repeated, striving to be very clear, "at the trial they accused Den—my husband, you know—of drunkenness. They got some of the crew to swear to it, and now Den has been put on the Black List, and . . ."

"Black List?" Witterspoon ejaculated. "Where?"

"Lloyd's, I believe. . . ."

"I see. Insurance . . . go on."

"The result is Den can't get a ship again—that is, as captain, you know—and his friends advise him that he must quash the judgment of the court before he can persuade Lloyd's to remove his name from this Black List of theirs. . . . Oh! I can't explain it a bit. I make a terrible muddle of it . . . but if you will get Mr. Sharum to use his influence to take away this—this bar, we shall be able to get on . . . otherwise, I think, we shall starve."

"Starve?" Witterspoon repeated. "Good gracious—you can't mean that!"

"I do. It brings us——" Lucy stopped as the car dipped to go down Ludgate Hill, and the railway bridge which spans the road appeared in the mist before them—"Where are you taking me?" she cried out. "Surely we have passed St. Paul's . . . we are going *West!*"

"Why not?" he questioned, smiling at her consternation.

"But—but I trusted you," she exclaimed, vehement at this jocularity. "Stop the car, please. Let me get down. . . . I—I can find my way alone."

"You can't," he asserted. "In an hour it will be black as my hat. If you insist, I will take you. . . ."

"Turn," she pleaded, her eyes soft.

"Very well—at the bottom," he grumbled. "I wanted to get you a cup of tea first—must go west for that," he prevaricated.

"Take me home, and I will give you tea there," she begged.

"It's a bargain," he laughed, unstirred by the pathetic break in her voice; unstirred indeed by any consideration but the one. And that Lucy had detected.

Instinctively she knew that Peter Witterspoon was not to be trusted. Without warning or premonition, by the

simple test of a few minutes' talk she recognised what in India had been blurred, perhaps, obscured by the larger conditions. She had danced with him, ridden early and late, fallen in and out of all the traps provided by the cunning of dear Aunt Mary, and never turned a hair. In those days she had moved more or less passively under Mrs. Faulkner's direction—she supposed she would have to marry. No one at the moment seemed clamorous for her favours. She queened it quite regally until O'Hagan turned up for a brief visit. And that settled it. Peter Witterspoon, who never had a chance before, was definitely made aware of it now. Aunt Mary explained that it was his own fault, laid further traps, failed, and told Lucy she was vexed.

That meant a great deal more than appeared. When a girl's aunt is "not quite old" and "very smart," it is easy to put a good deal of feeling into "vexed." That was one of the reasons why Lucy found life insupportable when her uncle was shelved. Dear Aunt Mary made it plain that there would not be enough to go round—and Denis O'Hagan came into his own.

And now Lucy O'Hagan was journeying through the streets of East London in Peter Witterspoon's car; and Denis was marching home through the fog, cursing his luck and Sharum with a virility which remained unquenched.

The car came round by way of New Bridge Street and Queen Victoria Street to the Bank, and thence at the direction of a constable into Commercial Road, which in spite of its name is but a continuation of East India Dock Road. They came slowly and almost without exchanging a sentence, for the traffic was heavy and the fog more dense now that they had entered the eastern shades.

Peter Witterspoon exercised his sick elephant horn alternately with one giving a deeper note. He was engrossed by the care necessary in those crowded highways; silent as he considered this problem which had halted him on his way to Paris and a splash. Yet, when presently they crept through a lane of costers' barrows, saw the flares and heard the din of chaffering he showed for the first time a touch of concern.

Turning slightly to Lucy he said—"You don't mean to tell me you live anywhere near here?"

"Next big turning after we've crossed the bridge,"

she replied at once. Then as he remained silent she added —" if you can persuade Mr. Sharum to be decent we can leave—otherwise . . ."

" You can leave at once," he broke in hotly. " You have only to say the word, dear lady."

" I ? "

" You. I—I have more money than I can use . . ." he began.

" No—no ! " she checked. " That would never do. Den wouldn't hear of it . . . nor could I. It is awfully good of you to think of it—but . . . Here we are, left please . . . a little way up—five doors on the left again."

Witterspoon made no comment either on her refusal or on the street they entered. It was wide, a tramway ran through it, the roar of carts and cabs and the clang of gongs pervaded it. To the dandy son of a millionaire pill-maker it was Hades. The smells offended him, the noise would make him deaf. Alone he would never have ventured near it ; but with Lucy beside him he rose to heights, would dare odds, would, if necessity compelled, stand and fight as all men do who love a woman.

He said in his throat that this girl would have been his had he played his cards better in India. Mrs. Faulkner had given him chances, Lucy had not repelled. There was nothing at that time to bar the way—now there was. Perhaps that was the reason he had failed in India and now felt keen, as he termed it. At all events, she could not pretend to love for ever a man who was unable to provide for her. Then his chance would come—then . . .

He alighted from the car and ran round to help her. Their hands met once more, and the blood coursed through his veins. It was dusk. He could have taken her in his arms—but he dared not. With some women it would have been easy enough to do so. With others the main difficulty would have been to hold them off, for he had a name for irresistibility, which some find " charming." But with Lucy, all this was impossible—quite, quite impossible. He recognised that it would frighten her. Her refusal of all help ; the phrase she had flung at him when he would have carried her West—" I trusted you," told him definitely he must wait.

Well—he could do that.

They came to the door, which Lucy opened. A passage, narrow and sombre, which lay before them, led straight

to the foot of the stairs which towered steeply to the first floor. They mounted together, and entered a room lighted with a glare of unshaded incandescence, which made Witterspoon blink.

He said—"Good Lord!" and screened his eyes. Lucy smiled, and crossed to join a small maid who sat near the child's cot.

"Baby awake?"

"No, 'em."

Lucy bent down, drawing the curtains, peeping; and Peter Witterspoon, who had followed, leaned forward, too.

"Yours?" he whispered, amazed at the thrill which flooded him.

"Yes—isn't he beautiful?"

"A boy, eh?"

Witterspoon leaned nearer, and the child stretched out his arms, beginning to fret.

"Great Scot!" he added again, "why—he's going to cry!"

He marched to the window, consulted his watch, and came back. Lucy was rocking slightly with her foot on the cot.

"I think," he said, "that I had better not trouble you for that cup of tea, Mrs. O'Hagan. I'm afraid you are going to be kept busy—and I can't leave the car very well in this fog. Perhaps I may come again? Some fine day, so that you may redeem your promise? . . . I wish you would let me . . ." he added, watching her.

She glanced over, smiling—"Come earlier, then. Baby rather monopolises me just at this time. At four o'clock—on any day. . . . I am always at home, you see."

To the tip of his tongue leaped the phrase—"You poor dear!" but he held it back and said instead, "Thanks, so much. I'll bring a car—a quieter one—and give you and the kiddie a run?"

Lucy signalled his dismissal. "Good-night," she said. "Yes—perhaps we shall be able to come."

He acknowledged her command, and passed away down stairs. The maid crossed over to watch from a window which gave upon the street.

"'E's put on 'is lights, 'em," she reported, staring round-eyed through the glass, "all four of 'em together, 'em . . . and—and now 'e's turnin' a nandle. . . ."

"Run away and get baby's bath for me, then ask Mrs. Shandon to send me up a cup of tea as soon as possible," Lucy demanded.

The car grumbled, and presently jerked away from before No. 45 as the maid moved to obey; but Lucy heard its voice, crying on the sick elephant horn—

"Fool—Fool. . . . This is my day—my day—my day. . . ."

That night Peter Witterspoon posted a fifty pound note to Lucy without giving any clue to the sender's identity, and two days later found, when he came in to breakfast, that she had returned it. In the note which accompanied it Lucy thanked him and prayed him to use his influence with Sharum.

Nothing more.

CHAPTER III

NO. 45, BEARSTED ROAD

THE O'Hagans "were staying," as Aunt Mary phrased it, in Bearsted Road, not to perfect themselves in the fashionable art of slumming, nor to write a novel; but because they must. They arrived in London on the twenty-first day of December, and on the twenty-second O'Hagan was once more without visible means of employment. They spent Christmas Day at No. 45 and found it sad. They liked it less now that the spring was come, and it was hot and breathless to boot.

Baba recognised that he hated it. Lucy and Denis noted the change in him, watched and blamed the milk. They said it was chalk and water, and a neighbouring Samaritan sent in half a tin of "condensed," on which she said she had reared ten. She did not explain the miracle, but Denis carried what remained to the docks and dropped it in Tidal Basin. From thence it is easy to suppose it reached the Milky Way, which is one of the titles unjustly bestowed on London's river.

Nor had the O'Hagans come to Bearsted Road for amusement, but because it was near the docks and not too far from town. And now, in April, although their dear home in Riverton was vacant and Baba asked plainly for the country air he knew, they remained because Den's case was not yet won, and it was impossible to consider the expense of housekeeping.

At no time had Lucy doubted Den's capacity to win in the end; but rather the effect of the strain it would entail on their slender resources and on themselves. It was impossible to hide these two factors. Logic told her plainly that you cannot fight lawsuits on an income of seventy-five pounds. Den had sold some of his Argentine Railways; obviously, therefore, the income was already lessened. That is why she agreed to her aunt's suggestion that she should see Sharum and, if necessary, Peter Witterspoon as well. She had done both. With Sharum

she had made no impression at all; with Peter, only a revival, as far as she could analyse a man's feeling, of the rather silly flirtation which happened in India. She still dreamed of success in spite of failure; still felt sure Den would win through; still argued in that sane head she held so high, that no man *could* be brutal enough to attempt to keep Den out now that it was understood that such an attitude meant starvation.

That is because she was young and, in spite of much buffeting, in love with her husband.

Lucy, daughter of Major Faulkner, had a great deal to learn. She was ignorant of the real position of that Bottle-filler she had married. She knew nothing of the law, nor of the Plaster Saint whom Jimmy Barlow arraigned. She believed the People controlled all Government, all officials, even that wayward assembly known as the House of Commons . . . and if you can believe that, it is plain you may also pin your faith to a miracle.

It was close, stuffy, airless in the dull room on this May day of balmy spring—and Lucy was engaged in ironing. There had been days when she was unaware of things called irons; but Baba had taught her. And now in his cot in the adjoining room, he refused to sleep.

Lucy put up her hands to press back her hair. She was hot; but she sang cheerily of "Owlets three, t'whit t'whee," and the boy ceased to struggle. But you cannot continue for ever to sing about naughty owls while you are ironing. It may end in burning your fingers, or a garment. Therefore Lucy ceased; Baba discovered silence, and filled it. Then, in the midst of a noise which threatened her ears, the boy shouting himself black in the face, the roar of traffic, the terror of it all at its meridian, to visit Lucy and gain impressions came Aunt Mary!

Eheu fugaces!

Mrs. Faulkner was a dear old thing and knew how to dress; but Lucy wished her in Boscombe at this moment. She was bending over some heating arrangement, and hot to the verge of misery, tired and "not even dressed," the boy lay flat under his net, expostulating with the knots which hurt his head, when the marchioness of the establishment, a forlorn personage with a permanent smut on her cheek, opened the door and said—"Hif you please 'em, a lidy would like to see you."

The address suggested a discreet halt somewhere in the passage ; but the " lidy " advanced, swathed, if that be the commonplace for so wonderful a creation, in crepe-de-something, soft and clingy without stiffening or embarrassments of any kind in steel or wood. The eyes of the marchioness took her in, dwelt on her, discovered her. They expressed wonder, then disdain, tempered with smiles, and in the midst of it the " lidy " passed in and the marchioness passed out, sucking in her breath.

" You poor dear ! " said Aunt Mary as she advanced with a rustle and the scent of violets. " Mayn't I unchain him ? " She entered the bedroom.

Lucy signalled advice—" Not in that frock. He might spoil it."

Aunt Mary peered over, acknowledging the possibility. " Poor old boy ! " she cooed. " Wouldn't Mamie let you det up ? " She nodded over the cot shaking the tall feather which crowned her. This produced so pronounced a despair that Aunt Mary decided to retreat.

" Teeth ? " she questioned, looking up at Lucy from the doorway.

" And the heat—he doesn't like London—do you, sonny boy ? "

Sonny boy bellowed his hatred and Aunt Mary crossed to the window. She began to dread a headache, but obviously the dear girl was tired to death, and the poverty was extreme.

Of course the storm ended, as they always do, by surrender of authority. Baba saw the net unfastened, felt himself lifted from prison, and at once found London not so bad, even in Bearsted Road. With the help of Lucy's finger he marched to see his visitor, stared at the plume and turned to his toys.

" It's awfully good of you to look us up," Lucy remarked in the new silence. " Do find a comfy chair somewhere."

Aunt Mary surveyed the specimens, chose one and sat carefully. She seemed to say, this is a lodging-house chair, one must be careful always—that is *de rigueur*—but in Bearsted Road, E., it is wise to accentuate the fact.

Of course she had no intention of being unkind. These things simply happened. They rather pointed to the fact that she found herself in surroundings that bored.

" I haven't seen anything of you for such an age," she complained, opening a fan and using it with a lazy swing.

" It seems centuries since you were married, for of *course* that tiny visit I paid you at your dear little home hardly counts, does it ?—and since then you have been more than half way round the world. How time does fly ! "

" It does, rather."

Lucy was considering certain elegant trifles in her aunt's equipment which reminded her that shops existed somewhere farther west which knew their business. She wondered, too, how it happened that Aunt Mary could manage it, and with an oblique throw asked—

" By the way, you never told me about the golf club. Did it come off all right ? "

" Poor dear Charlie ! " Aunt Mary commented. " No —but he is engrossed in its possibilities. He is quite assured it will make his fortune when it is known. He says it will mean a motor presently—and then he will be able to ride over to the links without the fatigue of cycling. Dear man ! "

" He always was a dreamer," Lucy smiled.

" If you aren't a dreamer after fifteen years of India and War Office Regulations, then you haven't learned your lesson," came crisply from the lips of Aunt Mary to correct her.

" What is it now—sashes or belts ? " Lucy questioned.

" Encumbrances," said Aunt Mary.

" Oh ! that's old. Lucky for you you aren't bothered. . . ."

" I took care of that," Mrs. Faulkner announced. " It is a mistake to be born at all in these days ; but to be born without money is sheer criminality."

Lucy glanced over at her mistake, and found him a picture. He was interested at the moment in building a tower. She had no comment to make, but she kicked out the hem of her dress and smiled.

" You can't pretend you are glad to have him," Aunt Mary ejaculated, nodding, the fan puffing hot air through her veil.

" I never pretend, dear," Lucy cooed.

" If only we weren't so desperately hard up ! " came in exclamatory fashion from Aunt Mary's lips ; and there it ended abruptly as it began.

Lucy smiled. She had a very distinct recollection of her uncle's establishment at Boscombe, and, if further evidence were required, there sat her aunt.

Mrs. Faulkner perhaps followed her, for she suddenly asked—"Where *is* Denis?"

"In town, auntie—I thought I made that clear."

The bells of St. Mathias chimed a quarter of sorts, and Baba looked up from his toys. He began to work the protest of all young things.

"He hates those bells, simply hates them," Lucy explained, as she strove to soothe him.

"How uncanny!" decided Aunt Mary with the acerbity of one thoroughly uncomfortable and thrown out of her stride. Lucy appeared happy—happy amidst this sordid furniture, amidst this ding-dong blare and shocking taste. How could she be happy? That skirt she wore was sufficient to make any sane woman miserable. It did not hang, it stood. A blouse, too, of all earthly discords, at something or other to four o'clock in the afternoon! A kiddy given to howling.

Happy! How in the world was it possible? Aunt Mary leaned forward attempting with her starers to pierce the veil.

"What are you doing with a child?" she asked.

"Trying to make him love his porridge, dear," Lucy evaded.

"I mean," said Aunt Mary with precise articulation, "what *right* had you to bring that child into the world?"

Lucy glanced round with heightened colour.

"Judged by your standard," she said, "I had none."

"Of course you hadn't. And," she complained, "that is where men have the whip hand of us, *when we are caught young*. It is quite sad. A girl marries, and before she knows she is awake there is a child at her breast; no money in the house, no servants, and presently, as I have seen, no husband. . . ."

Baba lifting up his voice by stages reached here the moment when it becomes necessary to do something. Lucy decided to pick him up and give him a ride on her toe. He enjoyed this for a few minutes, then again took up his parable.

"It's this horrid stuffiness," Lucy announced in despair. "What is the use of talking of things we can't alter. Baba's here—very much here, aren't you, pet?" she added, bending to hug him.

"Men hate children," Aunt Mary pronounced. "They hate anything that interferes with their comfort. If too

many babies come into a house—exit peace, dear child; exit everything worth having—even the man who begot them. That's human nature. I wish I had been able to warn you sooner . . . but who was to know that poor Denis would be broken in a year? . . ."

A train of bricks dragged by a spit-fire monster snorted past and Baba decided that life was not worth living. He yelled as vigorously as the engine panted. He kicked as though he feared the trembling motion that attacked the house, and in the midst of it Lucy looked over and said in a tired voice—

"We can't talk while this is going on. Wait. I will try to get him to sleep. He hasn't had a wink to-day."

"Poor dear girl! Yes, do. Do try, by all means. It's distracting. I wish I could help!" Aunt Mary jerked out.

And with that Lucy made her exit, entered the adjoining room, and with a voice that thrilled began to sing as she walked carrying him—

"Over the ditch
Slip, little witch—
Off to rest and dreamland;
Carrying dear Teddy,
Yellow-brown Teddy,
To laugh with you in Cloudland.

"Over the sea
Slip, little wee—
Tired of flowers in Homeland;
Holding out Teddy,
Yellow-brown Teddy,
To guide you up in Cloudland.

"Sleepily sailing,
Into the sky,
Sailing sleepily
Up on high.
Honey boy's nodding,
Honey boy's plodding,
Softly, sleepily,
Never a cry."

Up and down the room, down and up, singing, swinging, until Baba consented to rest, soothed by dear Mamie's touch. His eyes closed and Lucy stood still. She began to sing again in a great hurry as the bells of St. Mathias clanged through the quarters. He opened his eyes to the boom which followed.

Four o'clock.

On board the *Strathmuir* he laughed at the bell signals, in London he resented them.

Again Lucy sang—

> "Over the light
> Slip, little sprite,
> Quickly away to Shadeland;
> Talking to Teddy,
> Yellow-brown Teddy,
> Who knows the way in Cloudland."

And into the refrain she wove Denis' name, calling to him, praying for success.

But Denis was far off, far as success and as difficult to reach. If he would only come soon and give the lie to all these stupid assertions of Aunt Mary's. As though Den hated babies! Some men might; but not dear, kind, thoughtful Den. Lucy hated insinuations, but she knew Aunt Mary did not intend to snub her. She thought it smart to talk as she did. Lucy believed she would have given her eyes for a kiddy years ago, and when that became hopeless this sort of thing resulted. . . . Oh! if Den would please make haste home!

Lucy's voice ceased, she forgot to sing and in a moment the boy looked up awake. Then again came the soothing mother touch as Lucy surrendered to his whim, singing the song he loved. The words came with a tremulous note sad to consider. Before her eyes there rose a picture of the future—their very precarious future. She could not push it away. Perhaps some of Aunt Mary's criticisms had gone home; perhaps the knowledge that Uncle Charlie's golf club had not come off and that he in consequence had no spare bawbees either for Aunt Mary or his niece troubled her; perhaps it was just the way in which the information had been imparted; perhaps just a touch of nostalgia engendered by surroundings which were beyond hope for one not brought up in them.

Lucy sang on, her voice growing softer, more faint; her eyes luminous as they watched her treasure, seeking to mesmerise him. Was she tired? Oh, yes. Vexed? She was his mother. Sorrowful? Perhaps. Den had such horrid luck, such horrid, horrid luck . . . or, was there any truth in Aunt Mary's suggestion that these men intended to keep him out? Perhaps again. Business

people were mean enough for anything, "keeping their end up" they called it—yes, but did they?

She wondered as she sang, she watched as she sang—and this time Baba certainly slept. She left him in his cot, drew the curtain to protect him from flies and stood on tip-toe watching. The bells of St. Mathias clanged brazenly those terrible quarters we all know. With monotonous regularity, day and night they hammered out their secret warning. "Ding, dong, dang, dong—dong, dang, ding, dong." Lucy hovered ready to soothe. Did he hear? Would he wake? Mercifully he decided to sleep and presently Lucy was free to see her visitor.

"Dear child!" she encountered immediately on the threshold of the next room, "you should engage a maid." Mrs. Faulkner's fan waved, accentuating the point.

"Impossible!"

"That boy," said Aunt Mary, who had never dandled one of her own, "is too heavy for you. He will wear you out."

"Better to wear out than rust out," Lucy flung back, restless and ruffled in the still deadliness of this criticism.

Aunt Mary refused to pursue so thorny a subject. With pursed lips she said—

"Well, how are you getting on with Peter Witterspoon?—he promised to be very nice, and——."

"He has kept his promise," Lucy remarked.

Aunt Mary searched for the meaning of this and perhaps found it. She said—"But has he taken you to see that man?"

"That man" was Sharum, who, according to Aunt Mary, was the God of the Machine, or the devil of it, whom Denis and Lucy must propitiate.

The fan swayed.

"I went without him," said Lucy, and as swiftly added, "as far as the door," then paused, found work and commenced sewing.

Mrs. Faulkner leaned back in her chair, searching out the shabbiness of these rooms in which Lucy and Denis insisted on staying.

"I didn't advise you to go to the door, dear," she complained, "but to see the man. It was and is essential."

Lucy sewed on, remembering all she had seen and considered.

" Was Peter decent ? " asked the lady with the fan.

" I don't think he has improved," said Lucy.

" That means he has tried to make love to you. Dear little girl ! "

" It means nothing of the sort," Lucy flared ; then with a quick turn, ' What did you tell him ? What did you give him to understand when you wrote ? "

Aunt Mary smiled placidly, archly, which did not suit her—

" I said you were as pretty as before you were married. . . ."

" Then why did he call me Miss Faulkner ? "

" Did he ? How stupid ! Men have a way of forgetting a woman's name, especially when they don't wish to remember."

" Then I think it horrid of him," Lucy decided at once. " As a matter of fact I was thinking of telling him not to come any more. It is so easy to . . . to—oh, well ! with some men it isn't quite safe."

Aunt Mary's fan moved quite unfluttered by this. She said with an air of consideration—" I don't think that would be wise. Denis requires help. In some ways a woman can do so much for her husband. She need not let herself go—but she has finesse, and a man does not know what the word means. She can attract, persuade—a man can't do that. Of course, I mean *nicely*. When a man has been knocked down as poor, dear Denis has, it is his wife's duty to use her power, every means, every art at her disposal to help him. . . .

" Men—no doubt Peter is among them—have but one idea regarding women. If she happens to be pretty and young, it amounts to an obsession"— she shrugged over this. " Very well. Accept it. It is one of the facts of life. And make use of it to serve the man you love. . . . That is possible, *n'est-ce pas ?* "

" I hate it. The whole idea is horrible. . . . I—I wish I had not taken your advice. . . ."

" My dear," the elder woman begged, " pray don't act in haste. Play your cards well and you will win. Look at the position of this boy "—Peter Witterspoon masqueraded in this guise—" his wealth and his influence with *that man*. Oh ! you *mus'n't think* of giving it up . . . because, for instance, you fear Peter may fall in love with you. *Tout va bien !* That also is an affair of the moment.

Let Peter dream. When you are old, my dear, he will not be in love with you. Be sure of that. He will be in love with someone else—again *tout va bien!* Meanwhile let him carry your gloves. . . ."

Lucy looked up uneasily from her work. "I want to help Den, of course—but suppose he should hear of it before I am able to tell him?"

"Impossible, if you play well."

"Have you ever seen this Sharum man?" Lucy asked, while in her mind she questioned the wisdom of continuing either the conversation or the attempt.

"No, dear," Mrs. Faulkner bridled, "but I think if I had got as far as the door I should have gone inside."

She nodded over this, appraising the reticence she observed. Lucy had always been so outspoken, so ready with confidences—but now! Denis O'Hagan, no doubt. Well, one could not marry without in some way surrendering part of one's individuality. As Lucy remained silent Mrs. Faulkner questioned whether it would be wise to touch on that affair of the interview again. Of course she recognised it had taken place. Few women would require any assurance on that head. But Lucy remained provokingly silent. Her fingers moved swiftly over her work, her hand swinging out and back with splendid regularity.

Then a motor charged up the street braying of its agility, of its swooping escapades past slower vehicles, of the way in which it could successfully stampede pedestrians who ventured to cross the road—and that sent Lucy on tiptoe to the door.

She returned assured, flushed, but calm as the child she had visited.

"And this is so wearying for you," said Aunt Mary with her gentlest manner. "I am afraid dear Denis scarcely understands what it means to be compelled to see to a child of *that* age both day and night."

"Oh, yes, he does," Lucy answered, and paused to thread a needle. "He takes watch and watch with me if necessary."

"Watch and watch!" Aunt Mary echoed. "Poor dears! I'm sure you are in difficulties."

"Well—of course we aren't as flush as we would like to be; but we shall peg along until Denis is clear."

"I can't *think* what will become of you," Aunt Mary sighed.

"Don't try to," Lucy persuaded.

"My dear girl!"

"I mean it," Lucy asserted, flushed to the tips of her ears. "We shall peg out without anybody's help . . . we are not flush, as I said; but you need not have the slightest fear of our writing to Uncle Charlie for money. We shall not add to his difficulties . . . I wish his club had come off, of course, but even if it did, neither Denis nor I would dream of sponging on him, or you either, dear, so please go away quite at peace. . . ."

"Lucy!" Mrs. Faulkner interrupted.

"No—I won't discuss it, auntie."

"Which, my dear?"

"That man," said Lucy.

The fan acknowledged defeat. Aunt Mary leaned back in her chair, her voice hipped perhaps more than she was aware.

"You were made for a rich man's wife," she complained. "It's a pity you wouldn't take my advice and marry Peter Witterspoon. . . ."

"I loved Denis," Lucy interrupted.

"Oh! if we are to consider *that*, of course there is nothing more to be said."

"It is the beginning and end of all things," Lucy flamed.

Aunt Mary closed her fan and rose slowly—"If your uncle—dear man—offered me this," she swept the room with her fan, "and Peter Witterspoon offered me what he can offer you, I should try to forget that I had married Uncle Charlie. That might be a little cruel—for a time—but very soon it wouldn't count. Other things come in there . . . other women. . . ."

"But if you loved him?" Lucy gasped. "If you loved him what would you do?"

"My dear, *I* don't count. I like pretty things. Pretty things cost money. Get hold of the man who can give them to you—that is my creed."

"But if the man loves you . . ."

"Don't be childish. A man is exactly what his wife makes him. Never forget that."

"It accounts," Lucy smiled, "for an awful lot of bores."

Aunt Mary scarcely resented this. She said dogmatically, "Originally, of course, a man lacks discrimination. He never knows, for instance, how you are dressed. He is brutal, too, so be careful of powder. He

hates it and will tell you in a second if it is too thick on your nose."

"Not if he loves you," Lucy declared.

"I was thinking," Aunt Mary said, "of men who have been married more than three years. Love! Does that provide us with frocks and dinners?" She came near and held out her bangled arms, a woman of forty-five exquisitely tricked out to ape thirty. "*Au revoir*, dear child. Come and have a bit of dinner with me to-morrow. Bring Denis, of course, and arrange——"

"Thanks awfully. Afraid it can't be done," Lucy decided at once.

"Baba?"

"I couldn't leave him."

Aunt Mary leaned forward and offered her cheek.

"That is the worst of love," she said in her cool and insolent drawl, "it gives us babies . . . tut-tut! Keep fit and make haste to get away from this place. It's *too* terrible."

Lucy returned to her room and took up her needle. She began to work. Click, click, the needle made answer; click, click, click. And between each sound Lucy's soft hand travelled out and back, out and back, with the regularity of a machine.

CHAPTER IV

CONTEMPTUOUS EXISTENCE

Thin columns of smoke, ascending in spirals, attested to the lack of all breeze. It was three o'clock on a May day and the temperature that of an oven. For a week, after an appalling spell of rain and wind, the city had enjoyed a taste of summer. For seven days the sun had revelled on the grey and white sterility known as East London, searching it to the last corner and sending people clad for winter panting through the streets—but to-day, Saturday, was the worst of them. It seemed possible that thunder brooded somewhere ; that presently great drops of rain would splash on the hot pavements and the air would become cooler.

Baba was unhappy. He kept Lucy constantly busy, constantly tired. He was a new child, here at the heart of the city ; one Lucy scarcely recognised. Denis was unhappy, too. He came in weary from the never-ending interviews and consultations which occupied him at this time. He admitted that his case scarcely seemed to move, but that it would do so presently. For weeks he had been at work preparing it, early and late ; it mattered nothing, and now, so Lucy understood, they were waiting to get it set down for hearing.

When Denis was not with Stephen Hammond he was walking the byways seeking out those who might or might not know Cockney, the witness who had sworn to his intemperance. He was seeking work, too, of a kind which would not occupy him entirely. And this perhaps is more difficult to obtain than any other. Yet it was essential, Hammond decided, that he should be able to call on him at a moment's notice if need be.

London had shown O'Hagan the advantages of being unfit. It had shown him how the unfit score. He had a certain education—it availed him nothing. He was straight and young and fearless—but he had no capital. That remained in Sharum's hands—Sharum whom he could

not legally touch. A lie he termed a lie. Subornation he spoke of as the last deadly sin. These factors, if they swayed at all, swayed against O'Hagan. Never at one turn did birth or education aid him; yet for weeks in the London wilderness he had moved challenging fate.

The time had been long. Also, in a certain fashion, it had been short. He had not done what he set out to do; but he was weary—weary as are the lost Ten Tribes of being found.

The City in Spring, O'Hagan discovered to be a place of lassitude. If you had an office in it you could retire at will; but if you were of those who sought work the remedy is less easy. O'Hagan, however, at this time was engaged in following Worsdale's instructions given on the day before the great little man started for the East. O'Hagan came down to see him off—he was sailing on a voyage of inspection and would be absent for months. That happened in March, but O'Hagan had not yet seen reason to scoff at his advice. Stephen Hammond backed it too, and together the pair were irresistible.

Besides—it was essential. Whatever had been the position when O'Hagan took service with McClure, the question now was, in Worsdale's words—

"Get clear of that smudge." He spoke on the deck of the *Saladin* eight weeks ago, hammering in his theory. "They said you were drunk, my boy. Disprove it . . . if you can't disprove it, then, by the Lord! I'm sorry for you. You'll have to try your hand at something else . . . No—I can't blame Lloyd's entirely. On consideration of a very difficult problem I am inclined to think I was hasty in my judgment there. It is the court that set you on fire . . . or a thing they have the audacity to term a court. Disprove the lie they fathered. Use money—I have told Hammond what to do—and when I come back you can tell me how you stand."

Then he sailed and for months yet the East would hold him. No greater blow could have been struck at this time, although O'Hagan in his cock-a-hoop fashion would scarcely have admitted it. But it soon became evident Hammond was a lawyer with all a lawyer's dread of the law. It became necessary to move slowly, to make quite sure of the ground. He desired proof, proof at every step—and proof is a matter very difficult to obtain in questions of subornation.

For all that, quite early in the Spring O'Hagan got to work on this matter of finding the witnesses who had spoken at Jake Hall to his drunken habits. It was not an alluring task. It predicated the condition which Worsdale had labelled "smudge." It necessitated an immense caution, and entailed long hours of wandering in unclean bars and deadly "Homes"—the habitations of sailors. It involved an unwelcome and constant expenditure of those hardly earned sovereigns he had in store, and after weeks of mean trafficking he found himself no nearer the goal, but halting, baffled by the difficulty of advance.

All his searchings had been made east of the Monument. Tower Hill was considered a possible hunting ground. The offices of the Local Marine Board, Well Street Sailors' Home, various minor officials—all had to be seen. It was worse than dockwalloping, worse, more degrading than anything O'Hagan had touched since his trial.

And the net result of it was that Hammond considered he had no proof—which probably was true; that Sharum was at the back of McClure's action—which showed that Sharum was now a person as important as his offices seemed to suggest. It showed, too, that Hammond was impressed by the bigness of the antagonist he must attack on evidence so slender; that it would be wiser to throw the burden of producing Cockney on the shipowner by bringing against him an action for slander, defamation—call it what you will.

O'Hagan listened in despair. In the few years which had elapsed since he answered the advertisement which gave him command of the *Sphinx*, Sharum had climbed. He was a power in the world of shippers, a force which McClure stated must be taken into consideration in all future operations. The Syndicate, he heard, must take its place not because it was required by McClure and those others, but because it was big enough to force its way.

Hammond with a touch of sadness admitted that it would be impossible to deal with Sharums, Limited, as it would have been possible to deal with the tin-pot, one-ship concerns controlled by Sharum, Fit & Co. Trade was booming, freights leaping, there were not enough vessels to meet the demand, and shipowners like Sharums were reaping a golden harvest owing to the alteration of the load line.

Everything moved against O'Hagan. Matters seemed

to be approaching stalemate ; but Denis, who would listen to no variation of Worsdale's formula, continued to dree his weird as only a Scot or an Irishman can. The cold streets appalled him. The misery and degradation kept him quiet when he reached home. So the days dragged by.

Lucy at nightfall was often more tired than her husband, but she could not sleep as readily. The uncertainty of Den's position kept her awake when she should have been winning freshness. Her failure to do anything to help had developed into a kind of anguish, hidden, pushed out of sight lest Den should be pained, which tried her severely. Peter Witterspoon had done nothing. Lucy understood that Sharum seemed to shy at the proposal when coming from him, precisely as when she had attempted to win him herself. She wondered what would be the upshot. Sometimes she prayed. Sometimes it seemed futile to pray. Then she wrote to Aunt Mary that the end was at hand, and followed the letter with a telegram which said, " Take no notice. All well again."

Occasionally Peter Witterspoon came to take them for a run in his car ; then Baba, the small maid and Lucy would go swiftly through the streets to the green carpets of Epping, breathe the freshness for an hour and return. No news, though. Nothing done. No suggestion of Sharum's intention. No promise that it would be possible to use pressure in order to obtain his aid—only a more familiar touch from Peter Witterspoon, glances which made Lucy burn, suggestions for more frequent runs. Runs *sans* Baby and Nurse, so that Mrs. O'Hagan might learn the beauty of the country a bit farther afield, and understand what speed meant when they " let her out " on a road clear of town.

Epping, it appeared, was town to Peter Witterspoon here. " You might just as well try to run a car in Hyde Park." He spoke contemptuously. " Come out on to the road. Let me show you what it is like to swish. Choose a fine day, start early, take lunch, it will do more to bring back the roses than weeks of dawdling here." But Lucy pushed off these prayers, asked what had been done and received no reply. And then one day, a day of steaming mugginess, she threw finesse to the winds, openly challenged Peter to do something or stay away—never, never to return any more.

" You come to see me ! " she flamed, facing him. " What

is the use of pretence ? You come to talk and play with my life. You know I am married. Be a man and help me to pull through."

That produced explanation of the illusive sort. Peter Witterspoon was too deeply in love to be offended by a pretty woman's first outcry. He could not believe that she had any real affection for this rag of a man who was unable to support her in comfort. But he was too infatuated to risk argument, too uncertain of Lucy. He told her that as far as he understood the affair, Sharum refused to move because Captain O'Hagan had entered, or threatened to enter an action for slander or defamation of character against Sharum . . . " And so—well, you see, that will have to be withdrawn before I can press him very seriously."

He left her that afternoon with the advice that O'Hagan should make the first move towards peace by retiring his action. He left it to Lucy to break it to her husband or not as she thought fit ; but as he made it a condition it was obvious she must act.

She had kept all knowledge of her meeting with Peter Witterspoon from Denis, at first because she longed to be able to announce suddenly that she had worked the miracle which had saved him. She kept it afterwards, because as time went by it became more difficult to explain actions which at first had been simple, but now were complex. Car rides had come upon the scene, Aunt Mary's advice instead of Den's, attempts at love-making which at first had been suppressed . . . and now, at the end of three months' fencing, Lucy was faced with this additional burden and knew that she must carry it.

No wonder the days were long, the nights a terror, the heat devilish, the dust a cloak of misery. To make it all more difficult Den came home later and presently took to brooding—sitting in a chair, his head sunk, instead of talking or reading, as had been his custom. Lucy watched and drew conclusions. It was obvious. She strove to win his smiles, her heart breaking. He scarcely noticed.

Sometimes he was ready with his tongue to bite at the conditions they all faced ; sometimes content to remain silent, to sit still and watch the sky pale, ask for " the kiddie " and pass away into a trance. To-night he arrived as a train load of bricks thundered down the

street, the engine gasping, dampers open to wake who slept.

"Might just as well live in a coal mine as in Bearsted Road these times," he announced, brushing vigorously in the passage before the door Lucy had opened. "Dust in the air—dust on the people—dust in rooms and on our food—dust white on the coats of the horses these damned things are exterminating. Why don't they poison us and have done with it? Motors racing, lorries charging, trams clanging—no wonder the asylums are full. . . . I shall be a patient myself if this goes on. You too, dear child! Good God! What in the world have I done now?"

Lucy was in his arms, her face pressed against his shoulder, trembling and in a passion of apprehension. With ready intuition she had divined the cause of his anger. She admitted its justice.

He stooped and kissed her eyes, but without passion. He knew why she clung to him, but the black rage of his people was upon him and his tongue wagged on side issues.

"Isn't it enough to make one swear?" he asked, although they stood linked. "No water to lay the dust for us. Very few scavengers here—but cabs and cars whirring, flinging filth on all the fools who walk. That is their pleasant custom where poverty sleeps and man is deaf to noise. . . .

"This is the East End, Mem-sahib. A quarter where latitude exists for every driver, but none for the street in which he drives. . . . If you choose to live in Slumland you must accept what Slumland offers. It offers everything in shouts if you care to analyse its voices—shouts of argument, shouts of laughter, anger, misery; shouts of its desire to sell or buy, or fall down or sit up or blow its nose. It is all noise. A screaming note is the only evident method of speech; a whine, h-less and exasperating, lacking all quality. You may not care about the Yorkshire or Devonshire or Lancashire dialects; but the drawl of a cockney knocks you down."

Lucy clung to his arm. They mounted the stairs and entered their room. The child slept.

Outside the central noise of London droned on. Night or day it never ceased. It varied in degree and tone. It came more punctuated with sporadic clamour by day; more charged with a muttering boom by night. It was immense, prophetic, malevolent, terrible, according to

the mood of the listener. It made the heart of some to stand still, the heart of others to beat. It irritated those who were new to it, deadened those who were old, worn, but accustomed to its drone.

Like the dust and the smoke of all great cities, it was generally supposed that the world could not very well get on without noise.

In the seclusion of their room overlooking the bear garden, Denis persuaded Lucy that his anger was with things, not with his wife. He said he loved her as never before ; that her love alone kept him straight, that if she threw him over the world was at an end as far as he was concerned. He said that if she went back on him he would light a fire in the offices of Sharums, Limited, which would burn out the thieves and scorch that devil even if he were at his home in Surrey. There would be nothing left to think of—nothing. And then Lucy was sure.

He was plainly exasperated in spite of her touch, in spite of her promises. He had had such a devil of a time of it to-day—everything wrong. He stared in her face and her hand went up to soothe him. There had been some talk of that Cockney. He had been seen, but although Denis was early on his track, the thing misfired. Perhaps the beast had shipped again . . . in that case there was nothing for it but further waiting. If he got away to sea he would not be back for three or four months. The winter on top of us, too, by Jove! before we can move. . . .

" For two pins I would throw up the whole thing. If I thought I could get a berth again, command, officer, quartermaster even, I believe I should chuck this fight," he announced at last. " I'm tired of it. It is wearing us all down. In spite of Worsdale and Hammond I should take what is offered and get back to sea. . . . It is clean there. The wind blows devilry out of one. There are no sneaking meannesses. The seas wash you white—but business! God of my fathers! it makes me retch. It stands sneering over the ineptitude of those who have no money—yet live in London. . . . Married a fool, oh Mem-sahib . . . Married a waster. One of the sort that fill our streets and wring us dry. . . . What ? "

" No—no—no ! " Lucy's soft lips gave the lie to this, her arms clinging to his told him it was absurd, her flushed cheeks and half-scared eyes begged for patience,

and for a moment he listened, drew her to him and seemed at peace. Then again came a question—tossed out from the burden he bore—

"How's the kiddie?"

"Restless, darling. The hot, dry winds try him here . . . but . . ."

He sat forward at this, staring across the room.

"Getting beaten, Mem-sahib," he ejaculated. "Wife suffering, Baba suffering . . . the house out there at Riverton ready to take us in; but no money in the till, no chance of going to it. Getting ground in the Mill, oh dearest—the damned Mill which does not discriminate between rich and poor, educated and uneducated, hale or frail, by Jove! . . . except in the direction known as aid for the unfit . . . no wonder you are sick of it!

"*We* are the fit, you see," he pronounced in scathing comment. "In England to-day folks are more concerned to patch up the unfit than to keep strong those who are sound. . . . Sick of it all, dearest. Sick of it—sick to death!"

He leaned forward head in hands—but he had said nothing.

And again Lucy begged for patience, her heart throbbing as never before at the sight of his misery. Something had gone very badly awry to-day. She knew. She knew, and wondered what he knew. This was the first time he had given way so completely; the first time she had been unable to win him back. She pleaded for rest, forgetfulness, for trust; but he returned to his plaint with a twist as he sprang to march the room.

"I feel such a waster," he said. "I'm tied everywhere . . . can't move. If"—he halted before her with biting speech—"if we were of the submerged tenth they all prattle about, we should have charity societies tumbling over each other to get at us. If we were criminals, professors of pathology would enunciate stupid doctrines concerning original sin—but we would be fed. If you or I were simply useless"—he marched again—"malformed, semi-idiot, a means would be found to enable us to make a noise in the streets so that we might earn pennies. Baba could be put out to nurse. Somebody would feed him. But because we happen to be middle-class English people, and I a damned sailor fellow pushed over the rim by a scoundrel, no power will help me get back what they have

stolen from me—legally, mind—don't forget that—and knocked me down to get. . . . So, oh, well! that makes it difficult in these days, little Mem-sahib. Nothing but bills—taxes—rates—demands to know how much profit I have made by letting my house. . .

"Eyah! A poor man very soons learns that heaven neither showers manna, nor provides philanthropic ravens to feed those who are pushed into the wilderness these days. . . . That hurts us. It hurts us sometimes so badly that we squeak as I am doing now." He raised his hand standing still, his head thrust forward. "It hurts us so that we find ourselves considering the wisdom of oblivion—oblivion, the escape fools dream of—and a man comes very near the edge of things . . . close to it, Mem-sahib—close. It teaches him to be cynical—as I am. . . . Yes, I know, I know—but," he cried out, drowning Lucy's voice as she appealed to him, the tears raining down, "if you are a criminal you may not starve. If you are a damned sailor on the Black List you very probably will.

"Look to your skin, world! There comes a day when your Bottle-fillers will be organised, ready to go on strike . . . like the dock hands. . . ."

Lucy sat crouched on the rug at his feet. He was scarcely aware of her presence. He had come to earth again. His eyes were on the shadows which accumulated over there beyond the chimneys; his ears attuned to hear only the noise which came in to worry them. He was of the race which sees visions, hears voices, and is able to prophesy. A virile and splendid race when facing a path which leads to the stars; a sorrowful and dangerous race when hipped by curtailed liberty, oppression, Wrong masquerading in the still guise of Justice.

A movement down there at his feet drew his attention and he stooped instantly.

"Mem-sahib!" he cried out. "What are you doing there?"

"Praying . . . hiding," she sobbed.

He drew her close, his knees supporting her. He seemed astonished that her eyes were charged with tears. He leaned over her crooning—"Good God! . . . *You* couldn't love him! I've made you cry . . . couldn't . . . couldn't love him . . ." then in the words she used to sing to him—

"You are my soul—I am your slave! Don't mind my

moods. They come and go . . . come and go like the chances we have missed."

She clung to him sobbing. He soothed her, holding her close as on that night when she had entered the Valley of the Shadow; close as on that evening when the sands of Sahara lay beside them and the waters of Suez babbled at their feet. With his arms about her, swaying her to and fro as though she were still a child, he poured out his sorrow and his pain. She buried her face on his breast.

And the roar of the streets accompanied his words; the drone of a car rumbling towards the docks; the whirr of a breeze which presently would die and leave them palpitating on the grey shoulder of this giant city—listening to the throb of its heart.

She became calm under his touch. His influence was very real. She desired always to see in his eyes the light which now shone in them. She was afraid to break in with the paltry history of her attempt which in some way he had fathomed; but it was essential that she should. Told by a third person her indiscretion would be mountainous. She had striven to help him. She had prayed for opportunity to prove to him she was not altogether a burden, and opportunity had come to her in the guise of Peter Witterspoon the sybarite son, shrewd and alert, of a millionaire pill-maker.

How had this thing come to Den's ears?

She twisted and faced him on her knees, her cheeks flushed, her hands upon his shoulders.

"What have you heard?" she asked him with a direct touch that was tragic.

He met her, holding with his two hands the face she lifted to his.

"Too little for anger, Mem-sahib, too much for peace," he told her. "I happened to come home rather early the last time you were out, and——"

"Yesterday?" she interrupted.

He signalled assent.

"And they told you downstairs?"

"I asked for you . . . they could scarcely avoid it. I pretended I knew and they poured out their congratulations—'Lucky people to 'av such friends. Lucky for your dear good lady, sir; lucky for the bootiful child. It does 'em all good to get a run . . . bucks 'em up somethink wonderful,'" he mocked, and released her.

"And—and you have bottled it ever since—oh! my darling! . . ." She hid her face.

"I thought you would speak of it. I waited all last evening—I—I scarcely knew what to say as you didn't. And I hated it—hated it. Who is it, Mem-sahib?"

"Peter Witterspoon, oh dearest . . ." she gave back, with a rush that seemed to choke her.

"That millionaire man you knew in India? I seem to know the name. . . ."

"Yes."

"Hum! You should have married him, little girl. What is he doing here?"

She captured his hand and rubbed her cheek upon it. "Little girl loved you—you. No one in the world but you."

"Grossly unpractical," he commented, his ears recognising the appeal in her voice, his eyes refusing it.

"Love knows nothing of that," she told him.

"Then it should." He drew near in spite of this pronouncement, and said—"He is the man your aunt wanted you to marry, anyhow."

"Den! Den! Oh my dearest!" she flamed at this. "I wouldn't have married Peter Witterspoon if he had asked me. . . . I didn't know he——" and then she halted, troubled by the knowledge she had acquired, since she had set her heart on helping her husband.

O'Hagan made a gesture of disapproval. "Dearest! I didn't quite mean that. I—I put it stupidly. It's rather difficult to know how to put it. . . ."

Instantly she was leaning towards him, once more pressing his hands close.

"That is my husband again," she whispered. "Den, I want to see that light in your eyes always . . . no other light—no doubt or sorrow or anger, but just the look you gave me when you peeped in upon me and found Baba at my breast. . . . I love you, dearest. . . . I never loved anyone else, only you, as you love me—while God is God and we are His children . . . we are crossing swords to-day, Den . . . we are playing with fire—and it will hurt us and burn us unless we have trust in each other. I ask for your trust as I give you mine . . . nothing can harm us if we stand to that. Peter Witterspoon!"—scorn touched her with the name—"is nothing to me. He is a means to an end. He may choose to give me back happiness. He may help me to help you—you, who are

my life . . . my life. He is one of the pawns women are able to twist and break and throw aside. . . . He is not great or fine or very clean . . . but I am your wife, oh dearest, and you need have no fear."

He sat in silence, listening, his hands limply in hers.

"I wanted to help you. I saw you failing. I saw you at the edge of things, even as you said a while ago. I saw you falling—getting broken on the wheel, and I longed to show you that marriage need not make a woman helpless, a weight, a drag . . . that encumbrance thing they are always jeering at, and so I wrote to Aunt Mary. . . .

"That happened soon after we came here. I found out that Peter Witterspoon is the man who has put Sharum on his feet, made him big and difficult. . . ."

"Sharum?" he interrupted, sitting back.

"Yes." She watched his face, reading the signs. "Didn't you know they were connected?"

"How should I?"

"Then *that* is the reason you never spoke of—of Peter Witterspoon to me," she commented, her eyes wide. "Oh! what a stupid, stupid muddle! . . .

"For the first time in my life," said O'Hagan coldly, "I admit I am at fault as far as Sharum is concerned."

She put up her hands as though to screen her face from a blow.

"Don't! Don't!" she cried out. "You break my heart."

He made no advance. His face was cold as his tone, when he replied—

"I understand, then, that in the hope that Peter Witterspoon may play on Sharum's sense of justice, honour, or whatever it is the beast has, you are playing on Peter Witterspoon. . . . Come out of it, Mem-sahib," he said in cutting tones. "It isn't the work for women . . . it's men's work. The work of those who can give blows, kick if need be, jam their vile actions down their lank throats by sheer force of muscle. . . . No other way remains when the law stands mincing over shibboleths. No other hope exists. . . . Peter Witterspoon!" he flung out, rising. "If I get in touch with him I shall be sorry for Peter Witterspoon."

There came a knock at the door, and the maid entered

presently to find them quiet. O'Hagan held a book which he did not read. Lucy held work which had no needle.

The maid displayed no surprise. She brought in a supper of cold meat and hot cocoa, bread, cheese and butter. She sighed as she placed it duly on the spread cloth. With her head on one side she marched round the table re-touching her handiwork; then, moving to the door, opened it and stood to say—

"Is there anythink else as you would like, 'em?"

Lucy glanced at the table and said—"No, I think not, thank you."

The maid licked her lips—"Missis says, 'em, if you'd like a bit of beefsteak pie she's got one all 'ot an' ready to come up. . . ."

Lucy said she was not sure she wanted it and asked Denis.

"Pie!" He laughed awkwardly. "What in the world for?"

The maid took this literally, and replied *verbatim*—

"To eat, if you please, sir—because missis says it's the 24th, an' she alw'ys 'as pies fer 'er guests on Hempire D'y . . . an'-if-you-please-it's-no-extre. . . ."

Lucy began to laugh, but Den failed here. What he said sounded like—

"Ravens, after all, Mem-sahib! Rather. Never look a gift horse in the face lest he should turn and kick you."

So the pie was brought; the cold meat taken away. And the hot cocoa remained to wash down the pie. Then they sat down to look at it, and looked at each other instead. That brought tears and laughter most wonderfully blended; it brought the two from the stiff, hard chairs before the table to that horsehair-covered easy which had seen the gambols and sorrows of so many lodgers. It brought them to each other's arms, and the pie became cold, cold, fit for the back of the fire, where presently they placed two wedges. An offering, this, to the prescience of that statesman who discovered that England was ripe for a new and resonant patriotism. A salve, too, for consciences uneasy at the lapse.

Again peace stood with these two—trust, the love that still was theirs.

CHAPTER V

"POSTED"

DAILY during the months which had elapsed since O'Hagan reached home, notices had appeared in the shipping papers giving the "Doctors'" view of Jimmy Barlow's will-o'-the-wisp move to a New World.

"*Casa Blanca*," they said without change in phrase, "London. May 20, for Valparaiso. Boat found in 50° 45′ S., 66° 50′ W." Then followed the enigmatic figures which in January stood at fifty guineas per cent., in March at eighty guineas and in June at ninety-five. There were those behind the scenes who knew what this progression meant; but there were others who did not, who never saw them and upon whom the final announcement came with crashing force.

On the 10th of June there appeared a small explanatory notice which said that on that day the *Casa Blanca* was "posted." To be "posted" means to be lost, to be among those who are written off as Missing, who have vanished somehow, somewhere, and cannot be found.

The little tug made her plunge on this day in good company. Two other stupids who had managed to get mislaid, swallowed or knocked into a cocked-hat on some forgotten rock, gave her countenance. They were bigger than the *Casa Blanca* and should have known better. Of course they had all vanished long ago, months ago, but this was a recognition of the fact—the only recognition they were likely to receive—that they were missing ships. Between them on a moderate calculation they had accounted for seventy or seventy-five Bottle-fillers of the tramp brand with one hundred and fifty or two hundred dependants. On the ships and cargo full value would be paid. On the Bottle-fillers not a stiver without a fight. A modest hundred or so could be scrambled for, carried from Court to Court by wealthy corporations acting for shareholders against widows or mothers or sisters who held outrageous views about the value of a dead Bottle-

filler. *Bene!* Against all these a word is framed. " Fight." And in the dim distance a plaintiff may be seen escaping with a solatium scarcely fat enough to satisfy the law costs incurred in winning it. Better in all cases to-day to agree to be made quiet beyond the walls.

Jimmy Barlow's widow could not hope to win even on terms such as these, for Jimmy Barlow, to all intents, was Henry Tompson. The builders of missing *Casa Blanca* had never heard of Jimmy Barlow, and were sufficiently angry at the loss which they recognised. The Chilean owner's agent scoffed openly. He at least knew of no obligation which would compel compensation. Without means to engage a lawyer you cannot fight. Your case cannot be prepared. If you bring it unaided you will lose by the mere fact of your incompetence to plead.

Therefore, Jimmy Barlow's widow did what other women have done, and will still do—she rented a room again in East London and sat down with her girls to make shirts. Not until the end appeared, which surely would come upon her if she remained in the country, did she do this. Not until hope was gone on every hand, debt begun, hunger already stirring. Then in consultation with the O'Hagans she found her way back to her attic and gave it out that she was ready to " take up her old connection " with those whose province it is to find some portion of the material and to pay as little as may be for the balance and the work.

It was nearly the end of June when this happened, and in a sense O'Hagan's burden was increased. The sun shone merrily on city and country alike. It was pleasant on the hills beyond town, but in the streets heat radiated and became a burden. The smoke canopy which arches London keeps out in still weather the freshness which comes with night; the lights, the fires, the escaping steam add to the oppression. There is no cool borderland of lawn or shrubs or garden in Bearsted Road; no space for tents or chairs; no seclusion. From the wide-open window on their side the O'Hagans could see what passed in rooms across the way. If trees or gardens existed for those who live in that district, they are of the " allotment " type, far off, in the derelict space formed by the fork of railway lines, behind a bank of Regent's Canal, or on a slope, otherwise impossible, littered with patched tool sheds, bits of fences and decayed tins as ordered and

considered excellent by Parliament and the King's ministers.

Tired labourers sometimes visited these places, stood and smoked a while, surveying a desert of cabbage stumps and refuse. Wives, children and men strayed past on holidays, conscious of the failure of their 'garding,' and came by slow method to Victoria Park, where a band plays and there are seats for tired humanity. And here occasionally O'Hagan pushed Baba's carriage until he learned to know the boy dreaded the march it entailed through crowded streets. The clamour made by big and small children playing in the gutter and hopping through a strange game on the pavement frightened him. He was used to ship-noises, but not to the noises of London's gamins. He soon learned to say—

"Not darden, Mamie. . . . Baba not like a darden, Dada . . ." and that sufficed. They saw he shrank from the screams. Perhaps especially it sufficed when he learned to plead—"Baba like see wawa," which meant water or river—perhaps both to the small autocrat who ruled.

Even from this Eldorado O'Hagan came back ruffled and hot to the place they called home, Lucy accompanying him, smiling at his disgust. The child had ordered it. He seemed to nerve himself for the shouts which even this route entailed; remembering he was going to the river. To peep at it from the end of a ragged pier, for as yet no embankment exists for the draggle-tailed East-Ender, to watch for a while the moving ships.

When O'Hagan came here first he purchased a map and found a space called Ropemaker's Fields which at once inspired him. He discovered it to be a street—unbeautiful, and he searched for no further hints. He marched and found Narrow Street, then Broad Street, thoroughfares of Limehouse and Ratcliff—he examined the Isle of Dogs, a space with a luminous name he thought he knew, and found it a wilderness. Docks and warehouses, mean streets, mean wharves, noisy, chuffing railways existed in profusion; a wilderness where no sane dog would stay ten minutes unchained. No—the Isle of Dogs which had seen the *Casa Blanca* start for the New World would scarcely do as a playground for Baba who resented noise.

Sometimes the Tower Hamlets and City of London Cemetery took them in and gave them what peace may

be found amidst acres of strange tombs. But much oftener they made their way to the riverside and learned to be content with such peeps as the warehouses permitted.

Quaint bits of old London faced them here, strange and fascinating glimpses of that river which had borne them home. Down Limehouse Reach they got a notion of Greenwich trees, the Park and Hospital; up, they came upon the Pool famous for all time. Steamers trailed by, barges plunged and tacked, throwing showers of spray, launches swept to and fro challenging the tides.

Narrow often, indescribably rickety and dirty often, are the spots which command a view. Yet here the O'Hagans walked to give Baba the air he seemed to miss. Here they learned to remember a phrase he tumbled at them—" Babee wahed," and wondered what it meant. And presently Lucy resolved the puzzle with the question, " Tired ? " and the child with screwed-up lips gave back—" Esss."

And it was here they thought they saw him fade. They recollected, with a start of dismay, he no longer seemed keen on his food, and the challenging cry, " How's the kiddie, oh dearest ? " with which for months they had met, took a note which it had not touched before. It sounded a little wistful at first, then, as the heat became more oppressive, concern crept in, and Den one night, as he stared at the white face which once had been so brown, whispered that he would have to go and find a doctor.

That made Lucy start.

She gathered the dear mite in her arms and carried him to the window. He lay blinking at the light, but the pallor was more distinct. " Babee wahed," he said, drowsily.

" Oh ! you don't think . . . Den, you *don't* . . ." Lucy whispered, and got no farther. Her voice broke. She moved swiftly, her eyes veiled, staring from one to the other with the quick and penetrating glance of a soul suddenly alive to fear. . . . " Oh ! Den—it can't be that . . . we have only had him such a little while . . . and he is just beginning to talk and run. . . . Dearest ! what can it be ? What must we do . . . we simply can't have him ill—can't, dearest—can't . . ."

O'Hagan drew her to a chair and persuaded her to sit, and Lucy bent over the child, rocking slowly, the tears blinding her. . . . " Mamie's darling. . . . Mamie's

ownest. . . . Go, Den, go and find him. . . ." Then as the boy stirred, opening his eyes, she leaned down to listen.

"Mamie sing oh Babee," said the child.

Mamie sing! Mamie's heart was breaking even as Den's, while they watched the first surrender to the law which bids us sleep when we are tired; when we have been driven; when in the dark, beyond our ken, the Messenger stands and bids us prepare.

"Mamie sing oh Babee," came the demand once more, and with her sweet voice thrilling, Lucy obeyed—

"Over the ditch
Slip, little witch—
Off to rest and Dreamland,
Carrying dear Teddy,
Yellow-brown Teddy,
To laugh with you in Cloud—Cloud . . .

Then in a sudden tempest the soft voice broke, and there came to halt Den—

"Can't—can't, oh dearest! Can't sing that any more . . . if——"

Baba's dark eyes looked up wondering at the thrill which shook him. A small smile escaped and Lucy leaned over whispering the phrases which leap unrehearsed from the soul of the mother to the soul of a child. And in the midst of them Den bent down to say—"I shall go at once and—and find a man. I'll bring him back with me."

But it took long to find any man ready to come instantly to a case showing so little urgency. When he arrived it was nearly dark. Baba slept, and observation revealed but suggestions from which the learned may dogmatise.

Nothing very serious at the moment, at all events. Measles, of course, were rather troublesome just now, as no doubt the O'Hagans knew . . . infantile colic and other bothers accounted for a number of lives down here. The still air, you see, dust laden, crammed with germs . . . a difficulty that, more especially in the crowded areas. Poor little chap . . . respiration getting a bit thick . . . ought to have been away a week ago . . . but not now . . . not now.

Again, as he stood by the window facing the traffic, he emphasised this view.

"Just look at it . . . the new era they call it. Deadly,

sir—quite deadly for certain organisms. We can only guess at a tithe of the trouble that will come. Have you, for instance, assimilated the fact that cattle refuse to touch the dust-strewn strips of pasturage which lie beside a high road ? Cattle—and sheep, too—know what they are about better than we do. They aren't fools, if we are. . . . Throats, eyes and noses will suffer presently. . . . It stands to reason, when you consider it—by the way, has the little man associated with other children at all—any in the house ? "

" No—we know no one here."

" Quite. Well—let him sleep. Don't disturb him on any account now he *is* asleep "—he laid great stress on this—" and keep him warm." O'Hagan stared. " I will send you a little mixture presently, which will help him, and at about eleven to-morrow I will look in again."

In the passage, as he made his way to the door, he confided to O'Hagan—" It looks like measles. We are run off our legs with it in Limehouse just now. Pity you had to bring him here at this season. . . . Good-night."

And so to other bedsides ; one who divines for us from symptoms how we stand with regard to to-morrow ; who, had he been one of those " doctors " who practise at Lloyd's, would have marked this case for reinsurance at seventy-five per cent. premium without intermediate stages.

Seventy-five per cent. to insure against Baba's recovery.

Neither Lucy nor Den knew this. They waited patiently in the early hours of this trial ; in despair as it drew out. They saw no kindling in Baba's glance ; they saw his cold develop, his eyes grow filmed ; heard the wail which speaks of weariness, and sat in turn to guard and tend him.

Through the still nights while London sleeps, through the crass day when it wakes and works, they watched in turn, counting the hours till a crisis passed. Lucy sang his song ; Den attempted it. Then one noon, the sun standing high over Bearsted Road, Doctor Charlton came and stayed long, watching the ebbing life.

No hope for Baba ; no gleam ; no fleeting, transitory ray—only the dust which was killing him, the shouts and car jangle which kept him startled ; the voices of those who wrangle and barter and make love in one dull shout which reaches out and blends with the drone of London. No hope. Baba's life ebbing, complications stubbornly

refusing to yield to treatment . . . and the knowledge that this place had done it.

"As it has thousands, Captain O'Hagan," Charlton emphasised over the stricken man. "Thousands. . . . Let me take you for a run. They tell me you are off duty now—well, an hour will do you good. Come! You mustn't break down too, or there will be the devil to pay next time I come. . . ."

But O'Hagan thrust away his offer. He desired to be alone. He wanted to think. He said that he had neglected his work, and had an appalling amount to get through. He must run away and do it at once.

"Where?" he turned swiftly, reiterating it. "Up in the city. Work connected with my case, you remember." Charlton had no knowledge of the subject. He imagined O'Hagan was in port with his ship. "No one can do it for me," O'Hagan went on. "I shall be away two or three hours—safe, I suppose!" his voice broke.

"Yes . . . it will happen to-night . . . tide-time. . . . Come and have a smoke with me when you get back."

"Could you smoke if . . . if——" O'Hagan broke out.

"No," said Charlton, "I couldn't."

O'Hagan passed, carrying a malacca, which cut the air with the song of a whip, as he moved swiftly to catch a train.

Fifteen minutes watching an engine advance by stages to Fenchurch Street did not provide an atmosphere calculated to calm him. He entered the carriage throbbing, he left it in a white heat and took his way direct to that office which stood midway down Longman Avenue. He knew it now as well as Lucy had learned to know it. He knew it with a hatred which kept him silent, which stood over him whispering advice, telling him how he should proceed and conterminously warning him of the danger he ran in approaching it.

Yet he came to it now swinging a cane, grim with the anguish of days, as ready to spring as a beast whose lair has been robbed of a cub.

He climbed the steps and moved through the swing door. A commissionaire met him, wearing medals as on that day when Lucy entered, and said in answer to the visitor's question—

"I am not sure, sir." He took up a receiver and reached for pencil and paper. "What name shall I say?"

"O'Hagan."

The commissionaire looked up. " Captain O'Hagan ? " he asked, his eyes on the bronzed and clean-shaven face of this caller who stood over him.

" Yes."

The man made no sign. He was taking in a message from the office beyond. He recognised at once that he was confronted by one of those people he must keep out ; who in no case might be permitted to enter. He hung up the receiver and said—

" Sorry, sir, but Mr. Sharum is engaged."

" I will give him ten minutes,' 'O'Hagan answered, pulling out his watch.

Again the man said—" Sorry, sir—but he won't be at liberty till after four o'clock. Be so kind as to make an appointment."

" No," said O'Hagan. " My business won't wait," and he pushed through a second door. The commissionaire seized him.

Instantly, as it appeared to those standing beside desks, there was a struggle in which several joined. O'Hagan wrenched free and struck out. The commissionaire stumbled, fell, while the others closed in. O'Hagan with his back to a partition marked their coming and cried—" Not too near. I don't stand crowding. You have your duty to perform and I have mine." The commissionaire was on his feet, white and panting. " I am going to see Sharum ! " the clear voice proclaimed. " I'll see him quietly if he likes, or I will make a noise over it. . . . Ah—you would ! Stand back ! "

Again he hit out, and a clerk who had rushed in went down. There was huge clamour at once. Desks were slammed and men sprang to the assistance of those who had fallen. And in the scrimmage O'Hagan was dragged down and handed over to the police.

The Mansion House took charge of him.

Again there was quiet at the offices of Sharums, Limited, clerks bending over ledgers, heads of departments obsessed by the weight of affairs. In Sharum's room quiet too, the quiet of a man who questions the management of a Master of Industry.

Peter Witterspoon, negligent and at his ease, showed that he was not pleased with his friend. He rarely minced with words. To-day he was unusually distinct—

" You are boggling this thing," he said definitely. " To gratify your *amour-propre* or something I don't understand, you are going to be hauled through the Courts. There will be some nasty explanations. I know the law, and I don't like explanations. ' Agree with thine adversary while he is in the way,' is my notion of business. Why on earth let this fellow handle a muck-rake *now?* Things are different for you to-day, easy, if I may say so. What, then, is the use of pursuing a game that will land you in annoyance ?—me, too, if I know anything of the power of a cross-examiner."

" You suggest that I am acting out of petty spite," Sharum said stiffly.

" True. I thought you were bigger—but, as I told you, I knew these folk before, and, to be quite straight, I resent persecution. . . ."

Sharum fidgeted in his chair, crossing and uncrossing his legs. " I should be sorry to indulge in it," he said. " The notion has not arisen in my mind."

" You charged him with drunkenness, when you knew he was sober," Witterspoon rapped out.

" I relied on my agent's report. I was compelled to use the plea."

" Defended yourself, in other words, at the expense of a damned good man," Witterspoon commented.

He got up, found a cigarette and crossed to his chair, lighting it. " You put him out of the *Strathmuir*, didn't you ? "

" Yes."

" McClure was satisfied with him too, I heard ? "

" I had to consider the result of my silence in the case of the mate—and the subsequent loss of *Casa Blanca*."

Witterspoon nodded. " Well, now, that looks to me a bit like persecution, but," he threw the match towards the fireplace, watched as it fell short and rose to complete the operation, " but, what is to be the upshot now—going to prosecute ? "

" I have no option."

" I don't agree ; but take it at that. You remember, of course, things will be said about the *Sphinx ?* "

" What things ? "

Sharum in spite of his calm was angry. By his pallor, his immobility, this was apparent, and Witterspoon noted it.

" What things ? " he repeated rather aggressively for one in the swim. " Oh well—that she *was* unseaworthy with a deckload for one thing. That another skipper, Tipton, left her because of it. Tipton will come forward to prove it. They will swear that Tipton had three or four hundred sunk in her, and two other skippers, it appears, had similar amounts . . . that you got rid of them—I am giving you what will be sworn to—got rid of them when you had their money tight . . . and, mind you, I think this the ugliest bit of it all—when O'Hagan invested his five hundred, or whatever it was, you failed to notify him of the fact that the *Sphinx* was mortgaged up to the hilt . . . you—good Lord—man, you don't mean to tell me you can afford to let that sort of thing come out ? "

" It would not ! " Sharum stung back, " come out as you choose to put it. You seem to ignore my view entirely. . . ."

" I'm here to learn," Witterspoon interrupted, smoking and at his ease.

Sharum, for the first time, showed annoyance ; he leaned forward in his chair and banged the table.

" I decline to go into it now. It is complicated and much too long for a chance conversation, if it be chance." He waited for this to sink in, but Witterspoon made no comment. " You seem," Sharum resumed, " to have been at some pains to discover the other side. I don't know that I call it altogether loyal to . . ."

" Never mind that ! " Witterspoon interjected. " I want you to come out of an impossible position. I want you to refuse to prosecute that chap to-morrow and let him be discharged. He will be slurred deeply enough by that, if you want to slur him. Further," he spoke very clearly here, " I want you to write to him. . . ."

" Him ? Who ? "

" O'Hagan . . . and say that you regret the stupidity which caused the scene. Say your men exceeded their duty—anything you like, and offer him command of one of your boats . . . *Griselda*, for instance, in compensation . . ."

" What ? " Sharum banged again over this and instantly rose. He crossed to the fire and stood warming his back ; but he was not cold.

" I was fairly concise," said Peter Witterspoon.

"And if I refuse?"

"To tell the truth, my friend," Witterspoon intoned through cigarette smoke, "I'm getting a bit fed up with shipping. . . ."

"Fed up! Tired of fifty per cent.?"

"Not if it's clean."

The shipowner moved uneasily by the fireplace. He had come from small beginnings by the aid of this man's purse to a position of assured future. He was wealthy. Three years' boom, coupled with the knowledge that millions lay to his hand, coupled again with the strong brain which had manipulated events, had put Sharum on a pedestal. It had placed him where he was more easily assoiled than in those days when he stood on the floor. He knew this was so. He knew, too, that Peter Witterspoon was prepared to go all lengths in defence of these people. He was not ready to pay him out. It would be inconvenient—but "not if it's clean" rankled. In spite of his anxiety he squirmed over this. "Oh, come," he complained, "I don't think you are fair. . . ."

"It scarcely bears discussion, Sharum," Witterspoon interjected. "I came upon it by chance. Happened to know Miss Faulkner in India, you recollect. Never met O'Hagan himself; I don't know what he's like; but I don't care to be mixed up in Jew tricks like that investment of his. It hasn't quite a nice sound. I don't know much of business . . . ship business, anyhow . . . and don't want to . . . it sounds dirty. . . .

"Think it over. Give the poor devil a job . . . Damn it! you don't want to starve a chap because he happens to be a skipper you have rounded up . . . starve his wife . . . his kid, by Jove. . . . What? Look here . . . you seem to be top dog these days"—again with excessive clarity Witterspoon pictured the situation. "Once, I believe, it was the other way about—but you are too big to play to the gallery that fashion. And I have made you big . . . given you your chance, and yet . . ." He shrugged, threw away his cigarette, and stood ready to go. He tapped one boot with his cane and Sharum came to a decision. Behind the veil he had scarcely raised, his mind was at work—figuring out results. He was not ready, yet the question he put was—

"Why the *Griselda?*"

A ray of light crossed the room and fell on the blue

Delft bowl over there by the wall. " Happens to be at home and minus a skipper, I understand," Peter Witterspoon smiled, crossing to stare at the colour.

" I thought you knew nothing about ships ? " Sharum sneered.

" I know," Witterspoon hit back swiftly, turning, " just what I find it essential to know, when I'm dabbling in a thing. When I'm tired of it I know nothing." His hand was lifted, carrying the eyeglass he had used. " Well," he smiled. " Think it out and let me know later. . . ."

" No necessity," Sharum growled. " One way or another, I will do what you wish. . . ."

" Good. That's awfully decent of you. I knew you would. I could have sworn to it."

And again the Master of Industry shrugged over the phrase which fell—" Could you ? "

It sounded like a sneer. But Peter Witterspoon left the office unimpressed, and hummed away west until he reached the bank. Here, with the help of a constable, who held up the traffic, he executed a change of course which took him east ; and Sharum's confidential clerk who had followed in a cab was able to return with the report his master desired.

Sharum was perturbed. He showed it by marching up and down his room, not fast, but as a heavy man moves. Gone east again ! The *Griselda*, of all ships in the fleet ! The man's daft. Doesn't he know that the *Griselda* is another of those rollers that can't stand up with a deck-load . . . or does he——

For five minutes Sharum stood with his thought, rolling it like wine on his palate, twisting it, testing it, then quickly he put on his hat and went round to the Mansion House to see O'Hagan.

" This thing," he said, as he walked, " must be settled. It has gone too far."

At half-past four he was again in his office. He sat over a cup of tea strong enough to tan his waistcoat, as perhaps it did—but he did not blink. His critics said he drank tea which could be used as seed. He said, with a maltreatment of Shelley which was scandalous—

> " The seed ye sow another reaps,
> The seed I sow just finds me sheeps."

Argument with a man of that type is beyond the range.

CHAPTER VI

TIDE-TIME

Peter Witterspoon lunged east in his car, facing the dust and blare of Commercial Road with cool indifference. He had decided to ignore Lucy's wishes. He could remain away no longer now that it was certain new trouble had assailed her. He could not understand this dash of O'Hagan's, a fool-dash, he termed it, unless it meant that something had occurred which suddenly had driven him mad.

For weeks Witterspoon had obeyed Lucy's command—weeks which had turned grey for him the thing he knew as "life"—left him weary, wrung. But now he must see her again, talk with her, hear from her dear lips that all was well; or if it were ill, that she would allow him to do something to justify his existence as a friend. He was alert as ever, keen, but oppressed by a sense of disaster he could not understand. Something had happened; if that were not so why was O'Hagan now locked up for the Lord Mayor to trounce and sentence to-morrow?

Was it not obvious that Lucy stood in need of an adviser at this moment and that she required help? Again—was she not alone?

The bridge which crosses Regent's Canal, that dismal waterway which Baba would not accept as his river, brought Witterspoon suddenly to the acknowledged danger of a car moving fast through streets lately drenched with water. He skidded slightly on the tram lines, recovered and grazed the wheels of a lorry crawling towards the docks. He came past the church which reminds the pulsing thousands of every quarter lost to time; sought out a turning place and ran to the door of No. 45.

Baba was not at the window to-day to wave and smile; no Mamie, no maid to stare with pleasure at that wonderful car; but a woman he did not know dressed as a nurse, leaving the house.

Peter Witterspoon locked his brakes and passed quickly to the door. He was not the dandy and rather critical student of affairs who had lately sat before Sharum; but a man carrying, as he thought, a burden no other can share. He mounted the steps, entered and climbed the stairs as had been his custom when Baba waved a beckoning hand. He came to their door and halted over it, wondering whether he should open or seek the maid.

And while he paused Lucy came from the farther room to solve the problem. She crossed, white and worn, to intercept her husband.

"Den!" she whispered, "Come quickly . . . where have . . ." Then ceased and said with a note of despair —"Oh! I thought it was Den . . . I thought I heard his step . . . where is Den? Where is he?"

He caught her hands and held her, love in his brain, love burning him, bidding him take her now that opportunity was his; but the sight of her anguish sobered him and brought out what there was of manliness in Peter Witterspoon.

"Steady, dear lady . . . steady," he urged, holding her firmly. "O'Hagan is in town and can't get back yet. He—er—sent me to see you—er—to find out what's wrong, you know. He said he would be detained some time. . . ."

Lucy searched his eyes, noting the halting and indirect speech.

"What's wrong?" she repeated, laughing quite softly. "Can't come when Baba's dying! Can't? . . . Nonsense! That is not true. He could come. He would unless something has happened to him. Oh! I am tired. Don't plague me . . . where is my husband?"

"Baba dying!" was his comment. "Good God! Let me help." He was silent as to O'Hagan because at the moment Lucy's direct statement had startled him. "Let me help," he pleaded. "Tell me what I can do. Dying! Have you seen anyone . . . and why in the world did he go up now? . . ."

"You are holding me!" she urged, striving for release.

"You are not fit to stand alone. You are not fit for this," he proclaimed.

"Yes—yes. I am all right again. Please let me go."

He obeyed, but kept quite near, holding out his hands.

"At least tell me what I can do," he begged. "I am not a stranger. Let me help."

"No one can help," she uttered with a calm that staggered him, her face set, weary with the pain she had borne. "Baba is going to—leave us . . . couldn't stick it here, you see, so God is taking him back, taking him back," she reiterated, her gaze suffused, "because we couldn't guard him . . . taking him away from me—and Den has . . ."

"Lucy!"

The name on his lips startled her. But she looked up, shaking her head, dry-eyed, yet sobbing. "Too late to do things now. He's going," she whispered, nodding over the words. "Perhaps he has gone . . . he is so still, so white . . . my own dear Baba!" She moved towards the door. "God wanted him . . . but I wanted him more. Perhaps I forgot about God and so God is punishing me. . . ." She glanced over her shoulder shuddering. "London has killed him," she wailed in his ear as he leaned there listening. "Jake Hall began it . . . it broke poor Den, and after that came Sharum and the Black List . . . I wonder whether they have a Black List in Heaven . . . I wonder if there *is* a Heaven or if it is all Hell—every pathway leading to it—all the footsteps crowding along to reach it . . . even my Baba's . . . tiny Baba's . . . Baba's! . . ."

She broke down with the iteration of his name. Sobbing and blind with tears now, she ran to the room where stood the cot, the child placid upon it. She sank into the old horsehair seated chair Den had placed beside it, and said in tones which brought the blood to Peter Witterspoon's heart—

"The doctor says he will die at tide-time . . . is it tide-time yet? . . ." She leaned over, as Witterspoon drew near.

"Is it . . . is it?" she cried out. "He is still, you see . . . he scarcely breathes." Then, on her knees by the bedside—"Den! Den! Den! Oh why did you go away . . . why did you leave us now?"

"Lucy!"

Peter Witterspoon stood over her, his hand on her head, his brain on fire. She made no sign.

Again he urged, sinking to his knees—"Look up . . . I have something to say." He spoke very clearly, his fingers running over her hair. "Captain O'Hagan was called to the city. Sharum wanted him. Sharum is going to give him command. He says there has been a mistake and he will rectify it. I have insisted on this. It was the only thing I could do. O'Hagan will be back by six o'clock. Let me help you in the meantime. Look! I am going out now, you understand? to find another doctor. If your husband has not returned when I get back, I will go and fetch him with the car."

He found her hand and took it. She made no sign.

"That understood?" he asked.

With a small pressure she signalled assent.

Peter Witterspoon rose from his knees and left the room. He came down the stairs clattering, angry.

"Is there no one in this damned house" he asked of the grimy passage, "who can sit with her?"

Pale faces appeared behind doors held ajar at his outcry. Eyes which looked scared, and from one of the rooms the Marchioness made her exit, her eyes red, her unclean cap awry. "If you please, sir," she volunteered, "it were measles an' their nurse 'ad to go 'ome."

Witterspoon seized her by the arm—"Go upstairs and stay with her until I get back," he commanded. "Be good to her." He pressed a sovereign in her palm. "Mind! I am trusting you."

With that he ran down and reached his car, released her and moved slowly along the street searching for a telephone office. He found one in East India Dock Road and sent from thence a message to Sir Thomas Trauman, the children's specialist. Then re-entering his car, started on the three-mile run to the Mansion House to carry out his promise.

In fifteen minutes he had covered this and a constable came to meet him as he drew up.

"Officer in charge!" Witterspoon interjected, leaping to the ground. "Quick as you like."

"This way, sir."

The man led to a room within which sat an inspector and other constables.

"You have a Captain O'Hagan here . . . some silly row in Longman Avenue. Mistake all through," said Peter. "Is it possible to bail him out?"

"Not now, sir. It's done," said the inspector.

"That so—when?"

"Only just gone."

"Who by?"

"Someone from the office; a Mr. Sharum, who had charged him."

"Um!" said Peter Witterspoon, and stood at fault, considering what he should do. It occurred to him that Sharum had acted rather promptly, and there came a quickening of pulses as he recognised that O'Hagan was free. Well, it was useless searching London. He must get back at once. The charge would not be made. It was obvious that Sharum had decided, in spite of his tone, to reinstate O'Hagan. He saw, too, that had he listened to Lucy's prayer and acted at once all this latter torment might have been spared her. He stood frowning over this, lost, perhaps for the first time in a rather full life, in thought; noting the result of his lapse—that was it—the result of his lapse on this girl he loved.

The inspector's voice broke in here. He said, referring to the charge and its sudden withdrawal—"Rather a boggle, sir, it seems to me."

"Yes, by Jove!"

"A sort of thing that often happens, though. Parties don't seem to think just how dangerous it is to lock a man up—until he's locked up."

"Then they funk it, eh?"

The inspector drew a shuttering hand down a solemn face. He did not speak. There was no necessity after that blear look.

"Well," said Peter Witterspoon, "I'm sorry to have bothered you. I'll get away. . . . Night."

He retraced his steps, came to the car, and climbed to his place at the driving wheel. Mentally, as he passed a coin to the constable, he thought he was lucky in being spared to-night the eyes of his chauffeur. Again he turned to the East End.

Love drove him thither; passion; desire, if you will—but subordinated both of them now by the knowledge of Lucy's trouble. He could not efface the picture she had made. He could not push away the thought that he, equally with Sharum, had been the prime cause of her heartbreak. He could not blot out her cry for her husband, although here cynicism moved with facts he could

not explain. He did not seek to explain them. He was obsessed by a dream. Nevertheless, for all time that memory would be with him—he swore it—making him as butter before fire, making him feel small, mean, a pimp-like personage who has come very near to crime.

For all time ?

Peter Witterspoon, even as the phrase fell, recognised the *flair* of Lucy's presence ; the subtle and mastering force which drew him to her side. And yet, he had no illusions as to Lucy's attitude. She loved her husband. She would go to her death for him ; even as at that moment Witterspoon was prepared to face the end for her.

But there comes a to-morrow !

Peter Witterspoon recognised it and pushed it from him. He lived in to-day.

All down that clanging thoroughfare, which is East London's main artery, he saw Lucy kneeling beside the cot, alone. The picture troubled him. Tears welled in his eyes as though he, too, were a woman wrestling with a sorrow heavy beyond words.

A man this who could buy women as he had bought ships. True—but the dandy financier had made no attempt to buy. On one he had set his heart—one married, as luck would have it, to a fool who scarcely seemed to value her. Else how explain his absence at this juncture ?

With a clang of brakes Peter Witterspoon came round into Bearsted Road and drew up before the house.

A house this, occupied as far as two rooms were concerned by one known as a Bottle-filler—a man near the edge of things, on the Black List, and an hour or so ago in the cells for assault, both " premeditated and brutal " in its ferocity. Occupied, too, by those who wept, who battled with Azrael, striving to thrust him off, and who were baffled and made weary by the warring legions which accompanied him.

A house of dismal externals and insanitary. On either side of it and facing it, similar houses, standing cheek by jowl with a street whence filth and noise were flung to oscillate between straight frontages of stucco. Filth in the form of dust, noise as of a shipyard lay upon the people who lived in that street. At one corner of it stood a gin palace ; within a short distance several beer-houses—

places where a man at odds with life may sit and brood, drink and sleep until he is sober, howl and arraign the Force which has beaten him. And near at hand, upstairs in a poor back room at Number 45, lay Baba, quiet as the specialist who lately had stood over him could have desired.

"No chance at all," came authoritatively from the man of science who had motored down at the earnest entreaty of his friend Witterspoon. "Too late even to say whether a chance existed earlier. One cannot dogmatise in a case of this kind. There were complications, of course; but physically the boy was sterling good stuff . . . unused to the conditions he was called to face. Down here"—he waved a hand which women said was his chief charm—"of course, these small troubles are endemic. This is a matter somebody should ventilate when there is time. Ah, yes! Just so—when there is time."

He went away. Other matters pressed. The world throbbed on its journey through space, its gear jarring.

Lucy was on her knees beside the cot which was her world, struggling with tears and misery to discover coherence in the plan the Potter had set for her.

She reached out and placed her hand on the child's. She sought his pulse and was frightened by the flutter she perceived. Surely he was cold, too! He looked white and placid . . . but time winged onward drawing ever towards the dawn.

In a terror at her position here without Den, Lucy rose from her knees and hastened to the door. She looked down the stairs yawning into a dim chasm filled with shadows, and cried out—"Is there anyone there?" She rang a bell and called again to someone who stood in the vault looking up—"Send for the doctor! Has Mr. Witterspoon returned. . . . Eliza, is that you?"

But the Marchioness had gone back to her task in the scullery, ruled by a mistress who feared infection.

Lucy crept back to her room more scared than before.

She came to the bed and took Baba in her arms, wrapping him close in the blankets among which he had lain. She sat upon the bed hugging her boy, singing to him, her heart breaking.

He lay quite still. Flaxen hair damp, a little flush tinging the cheek upon which he had rested, his breathing difficult, his eyes closed.

"Oh! my Baba . . . my beautiful, Mamie's own . . ." that was the song she sang, the cry of her heart, as she swayed, hugging him. "Oh! my boy . . . my boy, stay with me . . . don't go . . . stay with Daddy and Mamie who want you. . . ."

She sang a snatch of his song, her heart thumping as she watched. She sang it swaying him to and fro—

> "Over the ditch
> Slip, little witch,
> Off to rest and Dreamland,
> Carrying dear Teddy,
> Yellow-brown Teddy,
> To laugh with you in Cloudland."

And he stirred in her arms, a smile on his lips. The warmth she brought with her touch perhaps halted him as he moved towards the dawn; perhaps God in giving him his marching orders bade him smile on the mother who had given him life. He opened his eyes and said huskily, very slowly—"Mamie sing Oh Babee."

And again he lay still.

Sing? Who of us who are young and filled with life could sing with death in our arms? Lucy obeyed. She obeyed because she was his mother. But she could not sing the song he loved. Her song became a dirge, a dream—wrapped most beautifully with her voice in thought; a vision perhaps—waking and inspired.

"God calls you, darling. Oh! He takes you from me . . . because I love you. By love I won you, Baba angel. . . . Bone of my bone . . . flesh of my flesh . . . life of my life . . . and you are mine. But the great God calls you. Back to God, oh Baba! Back to the All Father who sent you. . . . To the Tender, the Kind, the Omniscient who has planned and woven our lives so that we touch and pass on—touch and fade away. . . .

"Death, little witch, is nothing to the Good. It is not harsh. Must we not all die once? It is not very difficult when the time comes. We are more tired than we supposed. . . . It does not hurt as we thought it might. . . . Those who are left it hurts more than it will hurt Baba. . . .

"Life hurts, oh darling—laws hurt. . . . Life is made hard by laws which sting as death never stings. . . . Life grinds us small—death gives us life.

" Out of the dark we came . . . back to the dark we go, my soul. . . . Mamie follows. . . . Daddy follows . . . up to cloudland ; up and up to cloudland. . . ."

. . . . .

A sense as of an immense weight came upon Lucy's arms. She looked up. The gas blared. She became dizzily aware that she was no longer where for a space she had winged. Somewhere near a clanging noise drew past shaking the house, shaking the bed on which she sat.

She leaned over, searching the child's face, touching his cheek with her lips. Already it was grey. Already becoming cold.

Tide-time on the great river which brought them to London ; tide-time for a singularly beautiful child.

Lucy bowed over his still form acknowledging that she was alone.

Again Peter Witterspoon climbed to the room which held the woman he thought he loved.

Except for a candle which stood on the dressing-table no light remained. Dusk reigned here as in the street.

Lucy kneeled once more beside the bed, her vigil still unchecked. A small gleam thrown back by the looking-glass outlined her head and shoulders, her outstretched arms. She seemed to reach towards the boy, perhaps to touch him. It was as though she prayed for him. But no sound fell which could hide her sobbing breath.

Peter Witterspoon crept in as one who has no right to intrude, but is compelled by anxiety for the mourner. He desired to satisfy himself that she needed no assistance. He bent over her and heard her calling, in a voice cloaked and tremulous, for Den, for her husband who had left her on some incomprehensible errand just when she most required his care. He saw that she was alone.

He dragged back with the attitude of a thief. It was sacrilege to hear that prayer, tragic to remember the methodic hounding with which he had pursued her, refusing to heed her despair.

To hear her laugh, to see the play of light on her hair, to catch the swift talk in which she revelled had been his pleasure. He had played with her life, as she reminded him, and now death had come. For his own pleasure, knowing she was clean and beautiful, he had paltered with a situation which gradually had grown out of hand

and now bid fair to maim him. He knew her prayer had been for his help, and not for his love; he knew she begged for justice, not for his purse. Had she not returned the money he sent her? And he had pandered, frolicked, struggled to set himself in the place of the husband she loved.

Standing in the adjoining room, waiting now for the return of O'Hagan, knowing that before very long he must come, Witterspoon stayed to pay, as we all must who have played badly the cards which were dealt to us.

The drone of voices speaking in the passage caused Lucy to lift her head and listen. It sounded like a menace. She rose from her knees, weak from that long vigil, and saw Peter Witterspoon still waiting at the door. She moved towards him instantly, her eyes flashing hope.

"You have come back! Did you see him . . . have you found him?" she cried out.

He came near holding out his arms.

"He will be here presently—I was unable to find where he had gone. Let me help you. . . ."

She stood searching his face, repeating—"Where he had gone?"

"Yes. You see——"

Lucy met the halting sentence quivering.

"You are making it worse. Tell me the truth . . . what has happened? Has he *gone* away? He would not stay away unless he is dead." Her voice fell to a whisper. "Is *he* dead too . . . is he? Quick, I must know." She came very close, trembling, watching him. "Oh God! I am mad . . . I am mad to think of such things—but——"

Peter Witterspoon caught her as she swayed and carried her to the chair still standing beside the bed. "No," he said, "no. He is well." Then answering her question in the tones of one brought to bay, he added—

"Captain O'Hagan went up to see Sharum. There was some trouble in the office—they wanted to prevent him going in, I understand, and there was a scuffle . . . he intended to thrash Sharum . . . he was not hurt. . . ."

Lucy stirred under his touch. Her breath came uneasily as she leaned against his arm. Her eyes took a new light.

"I was not there," he resumed quietly, "or I could explain it better. After it was over Captain O'Hagan was taken away by the police." He paused over this, watchful

of its effect; but she signed him to continue, her lips drawn as though she too were repeating "thrash—thrash," over and over again. "I saw Sharum and we came to an arrangement. Sharum was not aware of the difficulties you have undergone, and I am afraid I scarcely realised them either." He put it so, nursing his opportunism. "Sharum is very sorry for what has occurred, and he has promised me to offer your husband the command of one of his vessels at once. . . ."

Lucy stood erect in an instant.

"Now? How kind of him!" she mocked, her voice low. "Generous! The sort of action I should have expected of him . . . the action of a thief suddenly alive to his peril! Do you imagine we will accept his offer in exchange for silence—and Baba . . . do you . . . do you?" she threw back at him, her cheeks flushed, her eyes passionate. "He has killed Baba . . . killed him—and he offers Captain O'Hagan the command of one of his ships in exchange. An old one, probably. One that will carry him to the bottom . . . do you understand . . .?"

He stood expecting a blow, but none fell, only the biting and true analysis of fact.

"If I were in my husband's shoes," she said in tense accents over the child's quiet bed, "I would take a whip to Sharum and flog him, then when he was fit for no more flogging I would shoot him; shoot him, you understand, and go down on my knees to thank God for having allowed me to punish him. . . . I would . . . oh! I would move heaven and earth to obtain vengeance . . . I would bring every secret knowledge I had of the man and his ways to aid me. . . ."

"Mrs. O'Hagan!" Witterspoon moved to restrain her, but she sprang from his hand, pushing him off.

"Don't touch me! Let me think! Let me think, or I shall scream. I tell you it is necessary to punish. . . ."

Footsteps sounded in the passage; the street door was closed, and instantly she regained control.

"It is Den!" she whispered, her face alight. "It is my husband." She moved to meet him, calling his name. "Den! Den! I have been waiting for you . . . I have been——"

He mounted the stairs at a run. It seemed that in his haste he had not heard Lucy's cry. He came on till he stood within the door, then paused frowning, and looking

from one to the other. But in spite of Lucy's outstretched hands he did not come near her.

Witterspoon fell back as he advanced, oddly diffident now the ordeal was upon him.

"I think," he said, "I owe you some kind of explanation——"

O'Hagan looked him over. "You do," he jerked, "but not now. To-morrow." Then pointing to the door—"Outside at once, if you please."

"But——"

A look of intense irritation crossed O'Hagan's face. He turned to Lucy, who, in mazed expectancy, had drawn near and now stood waiting. "Perhaps," he sneered, "you can persuade him this is scarcely the place for the mob."

With a gesture of apology, Witterspoon obeyed, and O'Hagan leaned down over the bed. He did not speak. He sank to his knees, his arms outstretched to shield the child.

CHAPTER VII

DUST OF THE CITIES

"DEN!"

Lucy kneeled beside her husband, her hand on his shoulder. He remained silent, bowed over the still form upon the bed.

She crouched nearer, hugging his arm, and for a long time made no further sign.

Cars clanged by carrying people afield or to their homes; the cry of horns booming on the river announced that already the boats were slipping down with the tide; bound out, bound away after miles of risky steaming, for the Baltic, for Holland, France, Spain and the Mediterranean in search of fresh supplies for the England we all love—the England which cannot feed herself.

Dust, noise and babble.

Across the way a gramophone droned a brassy version of "A Night in Eden"; around the corner an electric blinker flashed out advice on the choice of pills—perhaps they were the pills by which Peter Witterspoon's father grew rich. The crowd surging up and down the pavement, singing, shuffling, chaffing, had never heard of Peter Witterspoon; but pinned its faith on the phrase blinked out at it in red, white and green.

It was after nine o'clock, the shops closing, turning out their hands to take the air. A constant buzz of voices ascended to that still room where Lucy and her husband kneeled beside the child. And above the buzz came the iterated and sharpened noises, bells, whistles, horns and hooters. A pocket pandemonium of nightly occurrence at the heart of all great cities.

Dust, noise and babble. Fools making love, women seeking it. Fools protesting, women believing. The moon veiled, lamps garish, tram cars packed to the straps. And in the midst of it, in a dim room, Lucy stirring, tired, gripping Den's arm.

"Dearest . . . oh dearest—please speak to me. I—I can't bear more."

He rose as one dazed and lifted her. He stood with his arms round her waist, supporting her, looking down at the tear-laden eyes.

"You promised not to see him again," he said in tones she scarcely knew. "Come into the other room. We must talk."

They crossed the passage, and halted near the window which gave upon Babel. Then again he said, as she sat hopeless before him—"Why did you let him come in?"

She stared up puzzled, questioning her comprehension. "You mean Peter Witterspoon?"

"Of course."

"Oh, but Den! Den! You don't mean——"

"I mean," he interrupted, stern as she had never seen him, "that I seem to be in a fair way to lose you as well as my ship. I am sorry to speak of it. We must discuss it. . . ."

"Discuss it? My darling! . . ." She failed to articulate, pressed hands to her forehead, and for a moment closed her eyes.

"I put it as gently as I can, Mem-sahib," he said huskily. "God knows we have both had enough without Peter Witterspoon . . . but I can't leave it unexplained. It is worrying me. You are all I have left. Why did you let him come?"

Light dawned in her eyes. The hot blood flowed again. She looked up at him without a quiver.

"He came without invitation," she answered. "He came to tell me that you were locked up for thrashing Sharum and to see if he could help in your absence. I was proud of the reason which took you away from me. I had gone out to meet him, thinking it was you who came up the stairs. I knew nothing. Baba was dying, Den, and you were away." Her voice fell to a whisper. "He saw Baba was dying and got a specialist to see him. He tried to find you and bring you back to me. He did everything for me. . . . I was alone. I wanted help—what could I do?"

O'Hagan stirred under this. Reproach appeared, wrapped in her words, in her prayer. He was in no mood for judgment; but sore and bruised from the battle, disinclined to see this aspect of the situation.

"On one thing I agree," he said. "It is obvious I played the fool in being away just then."

"No, no!" she cried out, refusing his challenge. "It was fine. I loved you for it. If you had killed him I should have loved you still . . . but, you see, it left me alone."

"It is a pity I didn't thrash him six months ago," he said, with a sudden throw from the rage which consumed him.

"I agree," Lucy admitted at once.

"If an attempt produces the offer of a tramp," he announced with a sardonic twist, "infliction, no doubt, will find me a mailship."

"Den! Oh, my darling!" she pleaded.

She knew that Peter Witterspoon had compelled this miracle; but refused to comment on it. Some day Den would know.

"It is obvious the fellow is in love with you," he complained. "I hate to speak of it—but there it is."

"It takes two to make love," she sobbed, and came close, holding out her arms. "Den—you *do* love me, don't you? You do—you do?"

He could not refuse her appeal. He sank into a chair and drew her near.

"We are miserable," he said, "heart-broken, whipped. We scarcely know what we say. I suppose it is all right . . . anyhow, don't bother about it. I shouldn't have spoken now if I hadn't been down, down, touching bottom somewhere and alone. . . .

"That fellow has explanations to make. I must see him to-morrow. Well—I will hear what he has to say. Your part in it was involuntary enough—but his is sheer passion. Think I can't see, Mem-sahib? Think I can't recognise characteristics which belong to my sex? You can't see these things. I shouldn't care to think you could. . . ."

"Don't—don't!" she pleaded, her face hidden.

"Never mind! Forget it . . . leave it to me," he said. He drew her into his arms and sat holding her close, swaying her as a few hours ago she had swayed Baba.

"We will smooth this out," he protested. "If you want to cling to a man who can't offer you a stiver—a poor devil at the end of his tether, mind—good; we will pull

things out of the ruck. But if you want Peter Witterspoon, say so, for God's sake, and I will get out of your way. . . ."

She checked him with a word and a tightening of her hold.

"Love?" he whispered, answering her, straining her to him. "Of course I love you. If I didn't love do you think it would matter to me where you went or who you talked to? But I didn't marry you to drag you down . . . to show you hell. I married you to make you happy. I—I thought I could do it. I thought I could win out when I was hit . . . but there is no winning out for a man on the Black List. Nothing, as God stands over us, but the end which will come when——"

"There is love," she whispered to halt him, her lips against his cheek.

"You can't live on love, oh dearest."

"It can make you try to live."

"It can make you recognise the futility of living."

"I have nothing else to offer, oh my darling."

"Baba's gone," he whispered, his lips over hers. "What are we to do?"

"Fight on, darling. Fight to the end. . . ."

"Another six months of this and where will you be?"

"Here—at your side, my husband. Always—for ever, as we have promised."

The cars hummed by laden and grinding on their wheels. From over the way came the drone of a gramophone wailing of imperfections which were apparent.

O'Hagan lifted slightly and said—

"I have been thinking this out, Mem-sahib. It is impossible to avoid it. I have failed. The house will have to be sold down there at Riverton. It may produce fifty pounds over and above the debts which must be paid. I have failed all round and I am prepared to get out of it, and leave you with what is left of the wreck. You could manage to drag along on seventy-five pounds a year, but two of us can't. . . . No—listen. I am not mad. I have been thinking, that is all. . . .

"But for you and the dear kiddie I should have thrown it up and gone out of the country long ago. I am strong and have two arms. I should have got in somewhere—but I can't drag you about where I would have to go. It wouldn't be fair if you were willing. Money is getting

spun again, oh dearest, and there are these bills, taxes, rates, all accumulating, waiting to swallow what is left. We can't face it, and now Baba's gone I haven't the heart to try . . . that's the honest truth, Mem-sahib.

"Look . . . I will go alone . . . or if you won't stay we will go together. It isn't worth fighting about. Come! Aren't you tired of it all? I am. We will end it if you say the word." He spoke in hot wrath, compelling her silence. "Go away together . . . join the kiddie. . . . Come," he urged, his voice raised. "You aren't afraid, Loo . . . you aren't afraid. No! Nor am I. Look! It will take two seconds . . . we have nothing to live for but ourselves . . . nothing, as God made us, and up there we should see him again—see him. . . . Come!"

He stopped breathless and fumbling in his pocket. Lucy took his meaning and clung to him sobbing, her arms twined about him, holding him, taking the kisses he showered on brow and lips.

"No—no—no!" she panted, terror in her voice. "Wait—Den, wait. I can't think."

"Afraid?"

His hands came back to hold her, his face fell to its old position upon her arm.

"No—no!" again violently she refused this.

He paused wondering—"Then what?" he asked.

"Don't you see—can't you see? Den, we *couldn't* be together," her voice, vehement a moment since, fell here to a whisper. "We couldn't . . . God would have Baba," she explained.

Again her face rested on his shoulder and her arms encircled his neck. She moaned as with pain.

He leaned forward as before, sunk in thought.

The drone of the streets met his ears, the yell of a siren, the clang of cars.

Dust, noise and babble.

The quarters chimed high in the belfry of St. Mathias, but the world accustomed to clamour passed unheeding on its way.

Again they were in the back room with the child.

Lucy's hand found a way to reach Den's brow. He gave himself willingly to her power.

He grew calmer under her touch. Peace came to take the place of storm. He saw where he stood, how impossible it is to evade, traverse or push aside destiny. He recognised the plan the Potter had drawn for him. He saw it as a strange design, something he had never seen. It came to him through Lucy's brain, transmuted by her faith, trust, love. It came to cover the gashes and raw misery of his wounds. He saw with a new insight, faintly at first, but growing in power until at length hope dawned. Hope where there had been rage and despair. Hope in place of a torture seeking escape. Hope!

Only God who is our Father knows the barrenness of life from which hope has been driven.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SAILING OF *GRISELDA*

When a man is beaten and sore he takes no heed of the ointment used. Enough that it is said to be a cure; that it will heal his wounds and set him on his feet. It may not be the very best ointment for his case; but it is the only kind proffered, and he is too weak to make much stir.

The ointment in this instance was the *Griselda* S.S., a boat timed to sail for New York on the thirty-first day of August—four days from the date of Baba's return to Riverton.

In spite of their impoverished condition, without heartbreaking appeals to philanthropists or advertisements in the *Times*, these two idealists refused to consider leaving him in the cemetery which stood near at hand. It was one of the places he had declined to love—"Not oh darden, Mamie," was too fresh in their memories. It was one of the places which had helped to make him tired. It had stood threateningly over them all during the period of their greatest difficulty. Therefore the additional fees were paid, O'Hagan and Lucy went down to the old home, put dear Baba away, and sat heartbroken for the rest of the day by his side.

They were not morbid, nor sentimental, nor any of the fine-strung adjectives destructive of feeling; but young and torn by the blows of a whip which fell with equal force on both. Often they were like children in their simplicity —soft, gentle, loving. They appeared to have less knowledge of the head than of the heart. As on the sands below Suez, facing the emerald reefs which lie on the hither side of Zafarana; so here amidst the sterile fastness of the desert we call East London.

If that be an indictment it must stand over them. Nothing else did. Even Peter Witterspoon and his attentions had been pushed away, buried. O'Hagan had no need to see him. He refused to reopen the subject after that night of vigil with the child between them. Mrs.

Portland Lodge, who came to watch from behind bushes, and to weep in sympathy, gave it as her opinion they were the two calmest souls in the Riverton Cemetery on that day—the calmest and the gentlest.

And the *Griselda* S.S. was cramming herself full against her start, four days hence, for the New World. No freak voyage this, as in the case of Jimmy Barlow; but the ordinary routine trip of a vessel dignified by the name of a liner, but of less capability than many a Tramp. McClure jokingly spoke of the *Strathmuir* as a Tramp. Had she been as the *Griselda* he would have been more chary of the pleasantry.

Stephen Hammond, still busy on legally getting hold of Sharum, Ltd., had but one opinion on the question which O'Hagan proffered. He must accept. No other course could be considered as on the same plane. Legal processes in time, no doubt, would bring the fellow to book;—but this he had no hesitation in saying it was the finest move O'Hagan could make. Removal from the Black List would follow—for it was patent that when Lloyd's saw that Sharum, who had initiated the charges, had reinstated O'Hagan, erasure would follow. That stood to reason.

True. In any other phase of life but that held in fee by the shipping interests, it would. But there the abnormal is touched on every hand.

Sharum had done the thing he was compelled by Peter Witterspoon to do, quite decently, as the phrase goes. He had made the *amende honorable* in a way which left much to the imagination if little to be desired. He explained that nothing had been farther from his wishes than any sort of persecution. Especially this was so, seeing O'Hagan had been so unfortunate in his investment with the *Sphinx* Company. And, with regard to the money sunk in that venture, he had hopes that a considerable portion would be recovered when an end had been made of certain matters which still dragged in the Courts.

He was, as a matter of fact, the large and well-fed organiser of a throng of steamships—bottoms, he called them—which had to be kept rolling; one of those persons who stood with lifted digit to round in recruits on what he called specially advantageous terms; one alike a terror to established firms as to the men who suffered in his vessels. But he could be suave. At the desire of Peter

Witterspoon, who would " see him right in the question of expense," he could forget " the little difficulties " which have " arisen between us," and generally make himself agreeable to an out-at-elbows skipper aching for a chance to get to sea.

He could get him, with very little difficulty, down on the ground floor as far as salary is concerned, with " rises " and " bonuses " and " safe navigation " money jostling each other as inducement. He could order, without turning a hair, his " skipper " to accept gratuities, but to account for them in his returns. The skipper aforesaid would then be credited with a sum equal to ten per cent. on the amount, and the managing owner—Sharum *in propria persona*—would credit himself with the balance.

No wonder Sharums flourished and Sharum grew fat. No wonder Peter Witterspoon was able to rake in " cent. per cent." as he termed it, in his moments of fatuous bragging. Together these men were at the top of the ladder, O'Hagan and Lucy at the bottom. It stood as it always must where these conditions exist. O'Hagan, urged by his friends, pressed by his enemies, cajoled by his employer, accepted command of the *Griselda*, then went down to look at her. He did not like what he saw ; he liked still less what the mate told him, and he came back to Bearsted Road to tell Lucy just what he must tell her.

He struck the note very soon, aware in his heart and in response to her anxious look that it was the only one that mattered.

" I can't take you, oh dearest," he whispered, looking into her eyes, the thought of her loneliness thrilling him.

" Can't ! " She was in his arms, held close to soften the blow. " Oh ! but I couldn't stay away. Where could I stay ? There is nowhere to go, and now Baba is gone . . ."

He captured her roving hands, holding them close.

" Sharum says the accommodation would scarcely do," he repeated, " and I admit it is pretty bad."

She pressed to him in a passion of disappointment, fear, rebellion. " I don't mind what the place is like, dearest, I must be with you—with you."

He shook despondingly over this. " You know my wish ? " he asked her.

For answer she nestled close, clinging to his strength.

" Sharum says that if this voyage is prosperous he will give me a better ship, and that I shall be able to take you.

I fancy he seems inclined to take up the new attitude. They all talk in the same strain now. They question whether it is wise to allow a skipper to take his wife with him."

"Why?"

"Oh, the suggestion is that a man pays more attention to his wife than to his ship."

"But you will persuade him," she pleaded. "Tell him it is because of Baba. Tell him I can't lose you both at once. I can't, Den. Tell him so."

"I will do what I can, you may bet," he answered. "I will see him—by the way, how long would you want to get ready?"

"Half an hour—I shall *be* ready, oh dearest," she whispered, her hands on his shoulders as he held her. "Try—try! Let me see him," she begged, "or Peter Witterspoon. He would do it for us."

O'Hagan flinched at the name, but stooped to caress the soft, flushed face of this girl he loved. "No, no. I would rather do it myself, kiddie. Let me have my way. It is a man's work—not yours."

"And I shall be ready," she proclaimed in triumph.

The *Griselda* was to sail on Saturday by the early tide, and in order that the crew should have some knowledge of her and have time to get sober, the hour for joining was appointed as "eight o'clock on Friday evening."

O'Hagan argued that a drunken man is not of much use either at the wheel or on the look-out; but a crew is not concerned with details. Broad facts are recognised. Early tide, eh? Good. The men would be there or thereabouts when the ship reached Tidal Basin.

Men went to sea drunk in the old days often because they were drugged; but to-day they come down hurdy-gurdy, because they have been the victims of the compassionate farewells of many friends who have gloomily foretold the end. They have been warned that Hades awaits them; that the Atlantic will bleach their bones.

Very naturally, therefore, a man who is compelled to ship gets himself drunk. He has no great love for the sea; still less to get broken up by it. If he aimed at that he might find employment, for example, as a shunter. If he desired to escape jail, it is possible he might look with equanimity on life in a Tramp; but the crew of the

Griselda were not seeking to evade responsibilities. They were accepting them.

The mate and engineers being officers and persons of importance were already on board, enduring night and day work *sans* additional pay or rest. That they accepted because they must. But firemen and those deck hands who once were known as sailors were under no sort of compulsion in the matter. They came down or were carried down in a dribbling procession of units, " after the pubs were closed."

The men were good enough ; but many of them found it exceedingly difficult to stand still. The knowledge that they were shipped and must exist for some months in quarters called a fo'c'sle—a V-shaped space in the eyes of the ship—would have been sufficient excuse for that, had they seen it. But British sailors do not choose their ship after a prolonged examination of various fo'c'sles ; they ship when they must—which is to say, when they no longer can finger a bawbee, and are in debt to their forsaken boarding-master into the bargain. Sometimes they are ignorant of the name of the ship which is to take them to sea ; do not know in what dock she lies or when she is to sail. They are truculently aware someone will look after these details and dream of being transported to her, riotous in a taxi. Once it was *de rigueur* to take " an 'ansom an' a gell on each knee " ; to-day it is to " do the toff in a taxi, wiv a packet of cigarettes."

Only the hilarity remains unchanged.

At nine o'clock, then, O'Hagan came alone to his ship.

There was a suggestion of unrest in his attitude. He had been unsuccessful with Sharum, who had decided that Mrs. O'Hagan must remain on shore this trip. It cannot be said that Denis pressed for her company. He seemed uncertain, like a man who has propounded a riddle and still seeks the answer ; like a man who has accepted an appointment and now seeks to puzzle out what lies before him.

" Clear yourself, get out and win a Star," had been Worsdale's reiterated advice ; and it had made way here. It was the surest of all possible modes of escape from the consequences of that *Sphinx* disaster which still hampered him. He must go—with Lucy if possible ; but if not, then without her, his two hands and feet and brain to help him. Only in this way was it possible to impress

the vast interests which it seems were arrayed against him.

And now Lucy was alone at Riverton. Until mid-day on Friday she had been on board on every opportunity, helping with the arrangement of Den's room. With him she had looked into the holds, lazarette and store-rooms, in order, as she said, that she might visualise more completely his environment. She took the decision that she could not accompany him more quietly than he expected, but there was heart break in her voice when she presently commented on their splendid start from Glasgow.

"A year ago, oh dearest! A whole year, and only two of us left to jobble in the ruts. Remember the Broomielaw, and Inverary—and that coat you were going to get me?"

"Remember! God! Can I ever forget?"

She came close and, putting her hands on his shoulders, said—"You didn't *want* to leave me behind, Den, dearest?"

For answer he found her lips.

"No luck, my darling. None, none," he intoned. And she kissed him with a calm which steadied him. She recognised that the answer he had found was no answer. She questioned in her mind whether she desired one, seeing he withheld it. To be near him in the fight which was before him was of much more importance.

And now she had returned to Riverton and was praying for his safety. The dangers of his calling were derided by those who are considered experts. It was said that statistics proved the gradual decrease of accidents entailing loss of life. Insurance societies dealt in lives as readily afloat as ashore. Tramps were safe, liners more safe, palace-hotel-swimming-bath-combinations unsinkable.

Yet Lucy in her ignorance, petitioned for her husband's safety.

Woman-like.

A golden river took the *Griselda* on its bosom as she crept past Gallions and stole amidst shouting from the Pier Head into Woolwich Reach.

All hands were on board, including two white-faced boys who were there to learn what is possible of sailor-lore of a thing known to sailors as a Tramp. The masts were very

little higher than the funnel, and were stayed as no masts were ever stayed in the days of seamanship. They would not have been there but authority had decided they were necessary to carry the masthead lamp and to hold derricks aloft when cargo was handled. They were of steel with great tressels at the top of them ; and the stays which kept them aloft were of chain and wire. The only ropes, *qua* ropes, on board were those by which the ship's boats were hoisted ; and these should have been of steel —a fact authority had not yet recognised.

Treegan, the mate, employed at this moment doing what the men were incompetent to do, had no doubt in his mind. He was standing on the rail because it had been found necessary to " flake the boats' falls " on the davit head to keep them out of the sea which presently might be expected ; and to the second mate Treegan expressed his views. " Ropes that have been flaked are full of kinks," he said. " They won't run through the blocks. You won't get that boat into the water in less than half an hour."

" Less ? " young Evans questioned, cock-a-whoop on deck, " not it. More, if I know anything of the new scale rope-hauler. He's here to be fattened, not to work, sir, if I know anything."

" That's so," said the mate ; " and you and me are here to see that his grub is cooked properly and that he gets it without lip from the cook . . . Wish I'd never seen the sea ! "

" Wish I'd broke my neck before I came," said young Evans.

" Wish you had," returned his chief. " Keep the turns out of that fall."

" Wish I could," Evans protested ; " but it's steam laid and wants all hands to straighten it out. Eyah ! There she goes ! "

Treegan had nothing to say. The wind was up from the eastward, and the *Griselda* splashed along on the ebb, drawing down to Riverton. By the time the two mates, with the assistance of a bo'sun and apprentices, had " cleared the decks," she was trailing her grey length in the neighbourhood of the old railway pier, where O'Hagan rather expected to catch a glimpse of Lucy's farewell handkerchief.

He grew restless as they came near and failed to dis-

cover her signal. He searched with his glasses and still failed. They crept by, going "dead slow," because presently they must halt to change pilots; but Lucy had not arrived when at length the pier was melting in haze. O'Hagan marched the bridge, casting from time to time a glance over the taffrail, and decided that if she came now they would be so distant that she would be unable to distinguish one figure from another.

He walked with a sense of pain—it seemed like desertion—until there came to vivify him a recollection of the hour. It was not yet seven o'clock. To reach the pier in time to wave her farewell Lucy must have left home soon after six. He thanked her for remaining in bed, and smiled over the notion which bade him expect her.

At ten o'clock they were passing the Nore and driving into an increasing swell. The wind broke over the ship, laden with salt, and the tang of it fell on faces long strange to its assault. O'Hagan squared his shoulders as he marched up and down, considering his chances. A lucky start in the old days meant a great deal to the men who forced their way against odds to which O'Hagan was a stranger; yet luck is a thing to be prized.

True, they were getting a dusting at the moment; but that is the law. If you do not get it now you will presently, has become a byword at sea, and because the ship will have burnt coal and be lighter presently, Jack prays for postponement of the visitation. They crept even more slowly through the sands which are London's safeguard from assault by sea, and came white and spouting brine to the North Foreland. A rising glass, rising wind and sea, means fine weather in Channel, and when you are round the corner at Dover you have earned the conditions which follow.

The *Griselda* splashed very busily at the grey-green rollers she met. She moved in a smother of spume, which enveloped her after every dive, and made her shine. She emerged spouting brine, wet to the funnel rim and steaming, against the blue sky. She flopped with her counter and banged with her blunt bow, and seemed to revel in the smother she produced. She was wet, and she revelled in her wetness as though in a skittish mood an elephant had chosen to emulate the scaup—and the mosquito fleet which patrols the coast while England sleeps noted her tactics in passing.

She came into the Downs with wind and sea broad abeam, and found a squadron lying behind the sands, joyous because of their escape from wall-locked Dover. To add to their comfort, she sent a bow wave to disturb them, dropped her flag to the salute and breathed smoke upon the brightness. If she had flopped among those gleaming hulls from the clouds, like some new kind of aerial monster, she could not have produced more annoyance.

"That," said the officer known as C.O. to his second in command, "is one of the things we have to nurse in war-time. Ye gods! what a cow!"

But he acknowledged the salute of the cow.

So O'Hagan came round the coast to Dover, halted there to shake hands with his pilot, crept past the breakwater, his signals flying, and moved into the purple Channel which lay beyond. Nothing now before the *Griselda* but an every-day march from headland to headland, until Scilly was passed and the Atlantic rolled its sullen hills to test her strength. Matters these too far ahead to trouble either ship or crew, both now settling into their stride and alive to their luck. The wind was astern, and the old stager rolled before it, lolloping small seas as she went. Her fires hummed, the smoke from her lean funnel drove steadily in her path; the black squad energetically rattled shovels below and the crew nursed sore heads on the forecastle.

The cook came out of his galley and yawned brazenly, considering the magnitude of his task. In the cabin aft a yawn fell too; but no one heard it. The propeller grumbling beneath that cabin made no ado about smothering it.

A thin scud had drawn over from the east, and it was growing dark when O'Hagan called the mate and told him to take charge. It was dinner time in the old service, supper time in the *Griselda*, and the commander moved down to the saloon. The sun had set rather more than half an hour since, a red ball of heat, which touched the high ridge of Dungeness and made it glow. Now, however, the light had been made, peeping pale in the haze which rimmed the western land and sea, and O'Hagan was free for a while.

He crossed by the plank bridge which would be used entirely in bad weather and entered his cabin from the

saloon. It stood on the starboard side. Opposite were five berths, used sometimes as store-rooms, sometimes to accommodate passengers. Abaft O'Hagan's sitting-room was a sleeping berth, and abaft that a bath-room. These rooms communicated one with the other through doors within, and either of them could be reached from the saloon.

O'Hagan took off his cap and coat, plunged his face in water to get the salt out of his eyes, as he phrased it, and turned back to the room in which he had disrobed.

He crossed quite casually to take up his coat and, as he did so, a note lying on the crimson velvet of the settee caught his eye. He stooped over it in the dusk, wriggling into his coat as he did so; then with a quick dash, caught it up, switched on the light, and tore the envelope.

In those few seconds of time his eyes had expressed surprise, delight, and then puzzle. "Lucy!" was the word framed rather than spoken on his lips; and in his brain there flashed—"She has managed to get in a letter . . . God bless her."

He opened the note to read and the puzzle increased, his brow became knitted; there was an indication of annoyance.

> "Dearest," he read and re-read, "don't be angry with me. I simply couldn't stay away, and so I'm here—at least, I will be if you get this—locked up in No. 3. Do let me out and don't be too angry. Knock the C.D.Q. signal* and I will open the door.
>
> "Ever your own WIFIE."

O'Hagan mopped his forehead. Suddenly his temperature had touched fever point. "On board!" was what he said. "Ever your own wifie . . . on board—Good God!" Then he raged. "How the devil did she get here . . . who helped her?" and, after some wasted minutes, he thought it wise to pocket the letter, make no clamour, but take steps to liberate her.

Through the open door of his room he made a survey of the saloon. No. 3! It was within twenty feet—an innocent, unsuspicious looking door. This was terrible. He told himself in response it was thrilling, amazing, mad, wonderful. He got grip of himself. "Lucy on board! Lucy on board!" It seemed absurd, yet "God is God,

* Now replaced by S.O.S., "In distress, want assistance."

and we are His children," hummed in his brain as quittance. And outside there an owl-like steward, with sallow face and glancing eyes, hovered, patting a cloth and straightening knives.

"Devil take the man!" O'Hagan mouthed. "Why is he hanging round that door—has he heard anything—does he suspect?"

With the calm of a great tension the captain stepped into the saloon and called—"Steward!"

"Yes, sir!" The man sprang to attention, expecting perhaps a blow.

"Go on to the bridge and ask the mate for—for my binoculars."

"Yes, sir."

"They want cleaning," O'Hagan embroidered. "Bring them to me here."

Again the swift "Yes, sir," of all stewards who desire to be in the good books of their commander. He tucked a napkin under his arm, straightened his back, and with a lingering glance at the table darted off on his errand. At the end of the alleyway which received him was a door leading to the main deck; halfway thither a short flight of stairs mounted through an opening to the smoking-room above.

The steward elected to go by way of the stairs, and O'Hagan stood listening for his footsteps. Over the saloon was a skylight through which the man could peep if he wished to pry. To look down at his commander it was only necessary to walk aft instead of forward. O'Hagan failed entirely to hear sounds which would denote progression in either direction. He stood miserably cognisant of intrigue. Again a cold sweat stood upon his forehead. He could wait no longer. He must be certain where this man had gone.

Quite openly now, buttoning his coat with the air of one perfectly and coldly calm, he walked down the alleyway, climbed the stairs and looked out. The dusk of an evening singularly placid and inspiring met him—no steward though, either forward or aft . . . certainly not aft. O'Hagan marched round the skylight to prove it and came back to the stairs. He noticed that he had become quite breathless on that walk.

And now.

Down through the smoking-room entrance, fast and

quite on his mettle, his heart giving metronomic accent to his breath till he reached the door of No. 3, when it seemed to stand still. He drummed out his signal in a fashion that no operator could decipher, knuckles on door.

He listened, his ear near the jointure between panel and panel, and heard a sound.

Again he gave with staccato touch the signal which brings people to attention at sea.

And there came an answer, the key turned, and Lucy stood pale and blinking at the light before him. He scarcely knew her. It was all so impossible—then her whisper reached him—

"I had to come, oh dearest. I had to come . . . you aren't angry?"

"Angry!"

She was in his arms, and the door slammed upon them by the rolling movements of their ship. He searched her in the dusk, his hands finding strange contours. Then in a great turmoil he said—

"Oh, but . . . Good Lord! you are dressed like a man."

"Had to, Den. Couldn't risk petties here. Kiss me—say you are glad."

"Come into my room," he answered; "I managed to clear the coast somehow. Come now—quickly."

He opened the door and peered out. The silence of a saloon in a ship where passengers neither fuss nor grumble met him; the swinging tray swinging; the barometer swaying; the compass set beneath the dome of the skylight swaying. A placid night in Channel the motive power. Nothing else under the stars.

O'Hagan closed the door, locked it and pocketed the key.

"Now," he whispered, and they crossed together to the captain's quarters.

He closed the door. He took Lucy by the waist which was not hers and drew her into his sitting-room. The outside door he locked, still holding her. The door of the bath-room which opened into the saloon he locked also. The keys he put in a drawer. His arm never left her. With hers she clung to him as she could.

He crossed to the settee and sat down holding her back to search her disguise.

"You make a rather decent boy," he smiled up at her, "but what have you done with your hair?"

"Tucked it up, oh dearest. It is under my cap and muffler."

"I'm glad you haven't cut it off," he commented.

"Are you glad I am here?" she pleaded.

"What are we going to do?" he questioned, lifting his lips from hers, "now that you are here?"

Her arms were round his neck, she drew his down and kissed him.

"Live," she whispered.

CHAPTER IX

A THIN SHEET OF STEEL

It became necessary to invent some sort of explanation of Lucy's presence. The mate was rather a stickler; he might, too, recollect having seen the captain's wife on board—they must guard against that. The alternative to simple openness, of course, was concealment, an unthinkable and stupid plan only mentioned to be dismissed by O'Hagan. Concealment meant no fresh air, no sea breezes for Lucy; but the stuffy atmosphere of a cabin or store-room eternally guarded, locked up and watched by the captain. Again, unthinkable.

Lucy preferred an open bid for companionship. Den, marching the floor, alternately noting the door and his wife, listened and said little.

"Let me be a friend of yours, my husband—sent down by my doctor, you know . . . at the last minute of course . . . and—oh, no time to pay for a berth or anything. Say I am mentally afflicted and you found me in your room, that you used to know me, and that I have been in the habit of running away from home and getting into trouble generally. Say that I am going the round voyage, Den, anyhow. That in all probability I shall vanish in New York, but that I shall come back with you and pay up like a man. . . .

"Tell them I'm a fool, oh dearest, a scamp, a lunatic . . . but don't put me ashore or on any other ship, because if you did I should jump overboard and swim after you, get hold of a rope and tow behind you . . . because, oh, I am tired, dear dearest, lonely without—without my Baba, and can't stay where . . . where Peter Witterspoon can fuss and . . . and . . ." She leaned forward, chin sunk, her eyes pleading.

He halted beside her and took her hand in his.

"Little Mem-sahib!" he crooned, and kneeled one moment that he might claim her lips. "You have brought Heaven nearer—but it is as well you have wits

of your own, for mine are wandering. Just as well, too," he joked, rubbing his cheek with her hand, "that you happen to be contralto. . . . Smudge that upper lip of yours a trifle and leave the game to me. I will draw on what I used to call my imagin——"

The steward marched past and into the alleyway, where he rang a bell. O'Hagan was on his feet in a moment.

"That is how we shall get bowled," he whispered. "We can't be too careful here. My fault, of course—er—have you thought of a name, I wonder?"

"T. Brown, Den. It is on my trunk."

"Your trunk?"

"Yes—I couldn't very well do without one, could I? I sent it down by C. P. yesterday. I saw it on deck, you nearly fell over it once."

O'Hagan groaned.

"I'm no use at this sort of thing," he complained. "I should have forgotten the trunk. I should have forgotten my head if I had had to plan it all . . . Well, well! I am thankful to see you near after all. The future must take care of itself. Meanwhile I expect they are waiting for dinner—no, supper. And your name is Brown—Tom Brown, eh? and I think it likely I shall call you Kiddy as usual. Come in to supper. The mate will be there. I will introduce you. Keep that muffler and cap on. The cap rather suits you."

The steward re-entered the saloon as they took their places, O'Hagan at the head, Lucy on his right. O'Hagan looked across at him as he stood with finger and thumb gripping a rather pointed chin, taking in the presence of a stranger.

"By the way," he said, "I meant to speak of it sooner. Mr. Brown is a friend of mine. He decided to come at the last minute. Just lay for him in future, will you?"

"Yes, sir—certainly, sir," said the steward, but he wondered where Mr. Brown had been all these hours.

"We shall have to knock up a room for you somewhere," O'Hagan decided, glancing at Lucy as the mate appeared. He came in slowly, passing between swivel chairs and table, and took his place *vis-à-vis* with the captain's friend.

He sat down and unfolded his napkin, his eyes downcast, but aware of strange happenings.

"Still clear on deck?" O'Hagan asked, to break the silence.

"Verra clear, sir. Wonderfully clear, when you remember whaur the wind is."

"Beachy Head shows up all right, anyhow. Is it on the four-point bearing yet?"

"No, sir—but will be shortly, verra shortly now."

The steward brought plate, knives and forks and placed them before Mr. Brown; then lifted, with an air, the cover from a dish before O'Hagan.

"Ah!" said the commander. "Cutlets!" He looked at Lucy and questioned—"May I give you one?"

Lucy admitted she was quite ready and probably would require more than one. O'Hagan smiled and turned to the mate to say—"This is a friend of mine—Mr. Brown—Mr. Treegan. A very old friend, who decided at the last moment to join us for the trip."

The two bowed, and Treegan, as was his custom, said—"Verra pleased to make your acquaintance, sir," and added—"Likely that wull be your box that's been puzzlin' us aa?"

"I expect so," Lucy answered. "I am sorry it has bothered you. I ought to have addressed it 'Care of Captain O'Hagan,' I suppose?"

"It would have been easier to identify so," the mate gave back, his eyes lifted to the bright face whence came that musical utterance.

O'Hagan pressed Lucy's foot with his own and said in explanation—"My friend has but lately recovered from an operation—throat, you know," he touched his own, nodding gravely at the mate. "His doctor ordered him to go a voyage—to regain strength, but he refuses to sail with strangers, and so . . ."

"It's rather rough on Captain O'Hagan," Lucy explained in her clear contralto, pitched low for his benefit. "I have never been in a Tramp before. I have been in the Eastern Mail—to India, you know—with him, of course. I hate bad weather. It frightens me, you know, and I used to get Captain O'Hagan to let me sleep on his sofa—when it was really bad. Do you think we shall have fine weather all the way?"

The mate accepted this and enjoyed his cutlets as a man should who has come from the bridge to get them. He said with reference to the weather—

"Fine all the way? Nay—that's no likely. We shall get oor dusting somewhere here or yonder. For your sake I'm sorry to be compelled tae admeet it."

"Oh, don't heed me," Lucy smiled, a sad gleam despite her phrasing. "I shall peg out all right. I don't mind if the wind doesn't tear off my wraps. I have to keep them on still."

"Trouble with his vocal cords," O'Hagan explained, and wisely left it there. "Let me send you another cutlet, Mr. Treegan."

"Thank you—yes, the breeze has gee'n me hunger," said the mate.

"That reminds me." O'Hagan, on glancing up, had caught the steward, finger and thumb on chin, studying Lucy's profile. "Yes, I had nearly forgotten it. You need not trouble about preparing a cabin to-night. Mr. Brown can have my sofa—or my bed as far as that goes—for I shall be on the bridge and in the chart-room till we are clear of Channel."

"On the bridge!" Lucy exclaimed, her eyes alight. "May I come up too? . . . Oh, I don't mind where I sleep. Sofa—anything; but I must be able to come up and see things, you know."

"Of course, when it is possible," O'Hagan laughed; but there was no mirth, no ring in it, and Treegan stared hard at the cheese which was before him. This was a strange world, a verra strange world, when you come to think of it, he said without words.

So it ran—badinage, explanation, dust for the eyes of those who presently, in the absence of Lucy and O'Hagan, would make random suggestions concerning the youth with a falsetto voice and wonderful complexion. Who would dissect, traverse, build up and make a tangle of statements and actions, however commonplace. For that is the way with those who carry lives in their hands at sea, even in these days of radio-telegraphy and a Morse Code which throws broadcast a cry for help and waits confidently its coming.

John Treegan, more often called Jock, was one of the men Lucy would be compelled to meet constantly; the steward was another; Jeff Evans, the second mate, another, and all three had seen her when she came to the ship in dock. She had determined on this escapade,

as she now called it, after her first day on board. Since then neither officer nor steward had seen her without a veil. To be quite plain, the matter of recognition troubled O'Hagan more than it did Lucy. She argued that, since certain facts had come to her knowledge, she could not stay away, and recognition was immaterial.

While Den was with her she was at peace. When he was absent, now that the child had passed out of their lives, Lucy was like one bereft of all hope. If she could have compelled him, Denis would never have come this voyage, nor entered again the service of people who had robbed him, spoiled his life, and caused the death of his child. Curiously, Den did not quite follow her there, and Stephen Hammond had urged him to accept. Sharum, too, had spoken in sorrow—as though he knew its meaning. A small sneer appeared with the words. Lucy had a very large trend of contempt for the average masculine intelligence, but Den was higher than these. He was a giant among pigmies, straight where others were crooked, faithful, kind—her husband. Therefore he could do no wrong—no stupidity; but Lucy, as the hours went by, was constrained to ask for guidance as she had never asked before.

Now that the *Griselda* was on her way she recognised that Peter Witterspoon's note would be tested. She questioned whether it had been launched to keep her on shore. She questioned, too, whether the talk she had overheard was just or unjust of the ship. Time would test these things—time and a gale. She questioned whether Den knew, and decided to sound him.

Beachy Head, with the lights of Eastbourne twinkling nearly to its summit, claimed her attention as she came on deck to-night. The sea remained kind, the breeze sufficiently strong to dispel all fog; the dark hours spent on the bridge with her husband, part of that beautiful enchantment which no man could steal, no earth cover.

Both suffered. But either would have suffered more apart. They required bracing, and the sea would do that. They required a change of scene, something to take them out of themselves, to compel forgetfulness, and the sea was competent to do even that.

Lucy decided that to-night she could not sleep, and begged O'Hagan to let her have a deck-chair and a rug on the bridge—not where the navigators march, signal,

and pray for the end of their watch, but on the chart-room level, where one can find shelter perhaps beside a boat.

And here, at something past one in the morning, the breeze growing light, Selsey Bill's red sector vanished, O'Hagan found Lucy not yet asleep. He brought a low chair, sat beside her, and searched for her hands beneath the rug.

" Warm ? " he asked, leaning over her in the dark, " and not asleep ? "

" Oh, so comfy," she whispered, catching his hand and imprisoning it. " No—thinking. I shall sleep when you sleep, watch when you watch, be hungry when you are hungry—oh dearest . . . because, because you are all I have and the world is rather crowded. It would be so easy to miss you, even here, Den. I daren't miss you now. It would kill me. I couldn't go away alone. It wouldn't be fair—and—and Baba would ask . . ."

She turned shivering in her chair, and Denis leaned over, holding her hands in his, thrilling to her cry.

" You shall not miss me when it comes to that," he said in her ear. " I shall be with you—but," he strove to rally her in a voice which lacked enthusiasm, the voice of one acknowledging defeat, " look up, oh dearest, we are not going to lose—we are going to win. Remember, Worsdale will be at home when we get back. Fancy, I shall have scotched ill-luck, beaten the Black Listers and, perhaps, who knows . . . Oh ! if a chance comes my way I shall have won my star."

" But, if a chance comes," she whispered, " what will it be like ? "

" Salvage," he said simply.

" Where—when ? "

He nodded towards the distant sea. " Out there—this trip, next trip, some time. One cannot be on the western ocean these days without coming across chances. Ships run in a lane narrow as those of Sussex. Up there a lane going out, down there a lane for home. And there are meeting points. It is very crowded sometimes . . ."

He leaned forward in his chair, his hand on Lucy's.

" We shall be facing the unknown sea, presently, which Sebastian Cabot crossed and found so lonely in the days that were. You are here and should know these things, in case . . . oh well, in case we come across one

of those moments which exist now as they never did for Cabot. . . .

"Ignorance and 'heaps of ice' were the main difficulties he had to contend with; but to-day the ignorance of his crew has been transferred to those who sit in comfort at home to rule us—to rule the greatest fleet of merchant shipping the world has ever seen. England lives and breathes because I and thousands like me loved the sea as a boy and came out to discover it; it lives very comfortably and is content now and again to put its hand in its pocket to find something for the dependants of those who have gone under.

"You and I, to-day, Kiddy, have no fear. We stand in a world that is not concerned whether we stand or fall—and we, I think, do not much care what happens. I expected to come out here alone, Mem-sahib, perhaps to give you a chance, to free you from the chain which seems to be riveted somehow rather securely round my neck . . . but you chose otherwise—and so I tell you what we face to-day at sea. We are driven," he told her, without passion. "We have no voice in the equipment or the lading of our ships. We sail on lines drawn on a chart by men in an office at home. There is no money to be made or any chance for the future. . . .

"I am speaking to you now with my memory at work on things that lie behind very plain suggestions I have met pointing the way. I know I am telling you of what the vast majority face day in, day out, without question, because the majority are tied hand and foot to the thing which earns them bread. There is not much taste to nothing. We get a good deal of nothing, who are sailors. . . . Do I worry you? No! I know, I know. We, at all events, have no doubt about ourselves. We stand or fall together. . . ."

He leaned near and touched her forehead with his lips. . . .

"You are mine," he interjected, "but I cannot win you more than bread. . . . Whisht! the spirit of the dear old guv'nor stands by me to-night telling me to fight. And we shall fight. Perhaps we shall win, who knows? Not you nor I, oh dearest . . . yet we shall fight."

Again he was silent a short space, and the wind trailed up following them, making its entry in the great tressels at the mast even as in the days when ships were clothed in fleecy white and the sun looked out to kiss them.

" Cabot faced seas which were bare of other ships," he said again. " We face them in a crowd, all pounding along in a great hurry to lower the record, and to make a voyage which shall show a better return than last voyage. . . .

" Cabot faced seas in a ship which might hammer even on the rocks and maintain some likeness to a ship for hours ; we face them in a thing that cracks like a bottle if she is hit, and disappears like a breath. You have to be lively if you would be saved in these days from the results of a collision. You require to live in a Boynton suit. . . .

" Cabot faced rocks which were stationary, fixed to the coasts ; we face those rocks and others which are afloat. Every steamship is a floating rock, oh Mem-sahib, for the vessel that blunders against her or is hit by her. Ten thousand, twenty, thirty, fifty thousand tons weight go swishing past you, perhaps at ten, perhaps at twenty knots an hour, when a steamship passes. And that weight is cased in steel, steel bulkheads to help it, steel double skins for some of them. Their makers say they are unsinkable—Whisht ! Will they repeat it when they've been in collision ? Will they stick to their formulas when a ship has rolled over on the top of them, when the side has been ripped out of her, when her nose is flattened and you can drive a coach and four into her hold . . . Whisht ! I'm glad he's gone, my God ! I'm glad . . ."

He threw back, without explanation, to the loss of their child. Lucy, gripping more tightly, understood.

" That fellow said he might have been saved if we could have got him out of London—saved, oh dearest, you remember."

She nodded, the tears blinding her, and in a voice quick with emotion, O'Hagan lashed on—

" Saved to be a sailor—who knows ? It was in the blood. To be a sailor to-day is to be the supreme drudge of all—the nation's drudge, the thing which tends the machines which feed it . . . to be a sailor ! To suffer as I have and you have, to be pushed down and down until you have reached the Black List, to become derelict, one of the forgotten, driven into the workhouse, or perhaps found a Home by someone interested in keeping you hid.

" I know a Home," he hissed out, " where they stow away sailors who are derelict. These men start as boys in smart uniforms ; they join the sea clean, alert, full of

hope, and they come out tired, derelict, men who have escaped many drownings only to end life in the oblivion of a Home which fines a man of his weekly pocket money, the sixpence someone doles to him, one halfpenny if he is late for prayers; and stops the tobacco a wealthy patron has provided for his comfort—if he is late within doors at night. . . .

"Blind chance has been this man's overlord, oh my wife. Steel ships governed by the laws of Merrie England his home. The pittance he has been permitted to earn insufficient to keep him warm. . . . Baba live for that? Our Baba—mavourneen! I am tired of their flummery . . . tired, bitter perhaps; but what has gone to my making is answerable for what I am. . . . Perhaps I may live to tell them . . . perhaps we shall live to make some of them feel who, as God made me, I believe are of wood! . . ."

Lucy drew his hand near, pressing it to her breast, and whispered—"I am glad you have told me. I—think I understand."

The *Griselda*, rolling slightly before the wind, ploughed solemnly over a sea which had no confines, which melted into the sky without a break and made its dome immense. Stars stood high up in the blueness. Mist shrouded the lower heavens. The sea curled, mocking the ship's staring eyes with blobs of light—dim, pulsing, tinged with flame.

"Remember, I am going to win, Mem-sahib," O'Hagan pressed into the silence, perhaps because it might seem he had given way.

Lucy shrank in her chair as one does who parts from her lover before war. With her voice in fine control she gave him her answer—

"You are my soul—how then can I forget?"

But in her mind she saw pictures of the fights which have been, remembered Jimmy Barlow and the star* he had won, saw the tiny *Casa Blanca* passing down that tremendous coast to her engagement.

And the song of the sea was in Lucy's ears. She heard the monotone, thrummed on muted strings, which is the sea's warning—the everlasting murmur of a giant at rest, a giant subtle and indiscriminating, mindful always of those who challenge.

* Vessels lost at sea are marked on the wreck chart by a star.

The *Griselda* challenged. She marched during the winter months for a lading in America's chief city, and as Treegan, the mate, stated while still they were in dock, she was old and not fit to carry a deckload. It may be that Lucy, through lack of knowledge, magnified this statement in her mind. It may be that she would have come this trip even had she not heard it. But it reached her ear after Den had been appointed. It constituted one of the chief reasons of her presence here, disguised and carrying a small revolver, to take her chance like a man. It stood over her now, waking or sleeping, as no other hint could. She became afraid under the threat it held out. In a sense, therefore, Lucy posed also in the guise of one who challenged, who would propitiate, plead, pray so that she maintain her right to stand or fall beside her husband.

On the bridge, just forward of their chairs, a gong said —" Tong, tong, tong—light right ahead," and O'Hagan sat upright, staring over the bows. The ship plunged on, breaking the bubbles her forefoot had made.

" What is it ? " Lucy asked, recognising the still attitude which had come to him.

" A vessel ahead . . . Treegan has it—nothing to worry about."

" You rely on the mate, then ? " she whispered, watching. " Is he one of the sort you feel you can trust ? "

" In anything," he answered, " within reason, of course. He has been in her a long while, and knows her tricks."

He maintained an alert attitude nevertheless, and Lucy felt his fingers slowly leaving her hand. She gave him his freedom without words.

Again the gong spoke—" Tong—tong," this time, and O'Hagan twisted to the right.

" It is thicker than it was," he said. " I shall go to Mount Misery for a bit," he indicated the bridge here, " and in an hour it will be daylight. Try to get a sleep meanwhile."

She lifted her face to his and gave him his answer, " Kiss me, dearest, and I will."

He glanced about the dim deck and stooped over her. " This is more difficult than in the dear old *Saladin*," he laughed. " Good-night . . . I must go."

The *Griselda* stole ten minutes later past a boat which came out of the mist nearly in line with her track, crept up to give way for another, whose stern light had called

for the second signal, and thereafter, until the sun rose like a crimson shield in the ship's wake, the wind blew steadily upon them, sweeping the sea of all mist.

So they lurched down Channel, saluted the headlands which are crowned by signal stations, cleared the land, and headed into the Western Ocean. Beyond Cape Clear the wind veered, and the *Griselda* settled down to a punching match, which lasted with small intermission until she came in touch with the Banks. Small westerly winds blew in her teeth. Sou'-west, west, nor'-west, but no gales calculated to try those plates of which Treegan had spoken disparagingly. Would they be tested now, or were they to enter New York with a record for fine weather?

O'Hagan had his doubts, so had the mates. Lucy listened and had hers. Treegan prayed for what he called a fresh hand at the bellows. They spoke of fog and that night moved groaning through it, alert for passing vessels. The horn played its melancholy music over them. It said with monotonous iteration—"Look out, I am coming along. I am under way," and those who sounded it listened for answering cries. None came. Sometimes they stopped engines and lay still, straining to hear, sometimes moved slowly on.

They had come to the meeting place of ships bound east or west down Cabot Straits from the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Cape Race lay nearly due north, and fog in this neighbourhood is a standing feature.

Sometimes for days together the horizon is confined to a dim circle in which the ship's head and stern are lost; sometimes it is of a kind known as intermittent—clear in patches, foul, blanket-like in others. And here, as O'Hagan acknowledged, some vessels move at full speed trusting to their horns and their heels, and others go slow. Here the dead slow of a mailship is the full speed of a *Griselda*, and the ship which steams slowly is in greater danger than the ship which steams at full speed.

Lucy had gone that night for rest to a settee in the smoking-room aft. She did not expect to sleep. Only those who have graduated at sea can boast of sleep when the fog-horn is on duty. Yet she dozed, waking each time the engines stopped, or again at the more powerful cry of the siren which sometimes was used. That was unearthly, weird, horrible; but each time Lucy awoke

to the fact of its scream, she did so with greater reluctance, a greater lassitude and sinking of the nerves which control.

Sometimes it seemed she had dozed but a minute; but on reference to the watch she found time had escaped. Reluctantly she acknowledged it, lying fully dressed—all standing, as it is phrased at sea. She pictured the discomfort Den endured on Mount Misery, and would have solaced him. But with the advent of fog he banished her . . . and again she slept.

She awoke suddenly and lay listening, noting the gyrations of the lamp which bobbed and lurched over the stairs. It was soundless now, yet something had called her, something she had not known before, something which set her shivering as she lay there at question. The night held out no sign which she could read. The heavy air drifted in and made her wet. Her hair was wet, the pillow and the rug which covered her. Her heels pushing on the crimson velvet of the settee as the ship rolled, scrooped as they slid. The jar set her on edge; and from the confines of space there came to trouble her, Captain Worsdale's phrase so often repeated by Den as evidence of the man's perspicacity.

"Remember, my boy, now you are in command, there is only a thin sheet of steel between you and Eternity . . . Take that from me and go easy when you can't see. . . ."

Again—"It is not *you* I am afraid of, but the anxiety of all young shipmasters to make a passage smarter than some other body. Keep off that madness. If your company want you to take risks they do not pay you to take—come out of it. There are those who do. . . ."

The burden all through this was: Take care—you are in a brittle enough box, take every precaution. And now as Lucy lay there so near the sea, listening to the gluttonous clutch of its fingers, she experienced a dread lest she should be unable to find Den. Nothing yet had attacked the "thin sheet of steel," but Lucy was shaken. Something had happened. She glanced at the watch she wore on her wrist, an evidence of dandyism in the mate's eyes, and saw that it was half-past three. She lay on her elbow listening. The engines were stopped. Would they go on again? Why did they not? A far-off boom disturbed her.

She could face the solitude no longer. Not a soul in

that ship had any knowledge of her straits but Den, and he could not come near. She had no fear while he was with her; only a white-hot desire, which must be kept in subjection, to minister to his comfort. She rose now from her rugs and with a heavy coat thrown over all, made her way by the plank bridge to the deck, above which O'Hagan stood with his subordinates.

Lucy crept along gripping the man-rope, swaying with it over a chasm as the ship lurched. She had no fear; but on the other hand she could not see the dangers which surrounded her. She came groping like a blind man to the end, and saw the small round loom of a port. She advanced and stared through into the engine-room. The sizzling of oil and the smell of it assailed her here. She could see it dancing, spitting on the hot cylinder covers. And all around, as she withdrew her gaze, was the slobber of the sea.

She stood there, clad in man's garments in order to be near her husband. As a woman she would have had finer opportunities. As a man it seemed inevitable that she must take a man's risks. And the world was very empty just here.

Space everywhere, space made luminous by a moon somewhere lifted and shining on a world screened in mist. It gave an iridescence to the darkness which had the effect of semi-blindness. Lucy saw men as trees walking without knowing it. It was cold, too, raw, wet, and somewhere farther along that stretch of deck, obstacled by things she did not know, Denis O'Hagan stood in control. Lucy wanted to shout his name, but as a man that was impossible. The ship lurched to starboard. She clutched at the rail and saved herself at the expense of a wrench. She decided to follow the rail, and moved on until having rounded an angle her head came in contact with something that stood over her on the left.

She put out her hand to feel, and it traced the inequalities of a clinker-built boat, one of the two which sat so securely lashed on chocks on either side of the ship. She moved on, recognising it as a friend meeting one he knows in a fog-bound street. She groped and came to a stay, something wet and cold to the touch, which spanned her path. She must cross it, get under it, over it—she could not decide which.

Voices made talk somewhere near; dull, monotonous

voices which said nothing she could hear. She wanted to cry out, to call on Den to come and help her; but because she was a man she choked back the desire and climbed straddle-legged the wire as nearly in a panic as was permissible. What was on the other side? She pushed out to discover. Nothing. An open space beneath which unseen seas climbed and retreated licking the ship's side. Without in the least knowing her nearness to that end about which we prate and gesticulate, Lucy drew back quite certain she must make no more experiments in mid-air, but trust to the deck, the deck she could feel. Far off a hooter brayed to test her.

She sank on her knees, and with one hand groping before, her lips uttering Den's name, she crawled back from her entanglement. Tears ran down her cheeks unchecked. The fog had blinded her, the fog had made her wet, it could not matter. There was a sense of comfort in tears, a sense of relief after the long weariness of solitude, strain and risk. She could have hugged the deck upon which she crawled; but she would not cry for help, break down now she had come so far unsuspected.

Again voices assailed her ears. Minute, far off—very blurred and indistinct, not the voices she had listened to previously—and again she clung to the deck, unconsciously coming nearer the sounding board. Talk, shouts, a jumbled and fascinating mixture accompanied by strange bubblings, came to her ears. The blast as of steam and a noise which shook the ship—dull, far off, and in the midst of it a shriek on the *Griselda's* siren, which for hours it seemed had been silent. The thrill of her engines followed—a short spurt ending again in swift, indefinite tremors.

Something had happened, was happening even at that moment; but Lucy could not grasp the significance of those sounds except in a confused and inappreciable fashion. Yet she rose from the deck on reaching a barrier and stood clinging to it, calling at last to Den. . . .

"Captain O'Hagan! Captain O'Hagan!" How strange it sounded! How ridiculous! Lucy could have laughed; but for some reason she found her pulses thrilling and knew that at length she was afraid; that she dared not laugh.

Afraid of what? She stood staring into the void, one hand lifted to her lips, questioning what it was she had heard, calling still her husband's name.

He did not hear her. He was engaged on evolutions which demand great skill of a commander. He was busy solving the riddle of that unknown thing which, in spite of the fog, had sent signals which had halted the *Griselda ;* a thing which had waked Lucy and put her in touch with affairs she could not explain—a thing inanimate and yet in trouble, holding with a " thin sheet of steel " all those who had worked her from the results of their blindness. And into the wall of fog Lucy sent her cry—" Captain O'Hagan ! Hallo ! Hallo ! " came in clear contralto, iterated, sung, shouted, until a deeper voice fell upon the periods saying—

" Yes—yes ! Hallo ! Where are you ? " and she recognised that someone was at hand.

" On the bridge deck ! " she sang again, " between the engine room and the plank bridge. . . ."

" Is it Mr. Brown ? " called the voice.

" Yes ! "

And in Lucy's brain the answer ran on and on thus—" or Mr. Smith or Mr. Jones . . . anybody, you know, who is nobody. . . ."

" Stay where you are, sir . . . it's thick as peas pudding and twice as nasty," said the voice, and Lucy remained clinging.

On the other side of the deck, somewhere amidst the fog, voices, thumps, and blows went on in a genial turmoil. One of the crew came groping up a ladder from the main deck, vaulted the rail and stood before Lucy.

" Bin lookin' fer you hevery-where, sir," he announced, " aft, for'ard, in the smoke-room. I've got to take you to the bridge. The old man sent me. . . ."

" The old man ? " Lucy halted over the description and added, " Oh yes—yes, I forgot. What is happening ? "

" There's bin a collision,' said the man as he moved forward, " an' we . . . 'ear that siren ? "

" A collision ? Are we damaged, then. . . . Is that why they are bumping over there by the boats ? "

" Not wiv us," he gave back in terse sentences, " some chap over there. 'Im that's whistlin'," he jerked with his thumb at the grey wall of fog. " Somethin's 'it 'im an' ee's away fer the cellar. . . ."

" So we are sending our boats, is that it ? " Lucy inferred, coming near the bridge at last.

" We're gettin' 'em ready, sir," was his answer. " They

are froze in wiv paint as per usual . . . and," he added enigmatically, " we've got to find out w'ere ee is."

He pushed lightly with his elbow, piloting Lucy towards the ladder. " Up there," he grumbled, " you'll find the old man," and Lucy stood alone.

She paused and caught the siren note more plainly. She seemed confused. Up there ? Oh, of course—the bridge was beyond the stairs. She had been so absorbed by the swift sentences of her guide that his departure without fuller information seemed to trouble her. Everything was so unreal in this fog except the sense of peril —that was very real. She took hold and climbed the ladder in time to see O'Hagan cross rapidly and push the telegraph down to full speed. The siren afar off kept up a nearly continuous wail.

" Port ! " said O'Hagan, turning back to the wheel. Then, looking aft, " Hurry up with that boat. Some of you prepare No. 2."

He crossed to the wing and Lucy intercepted him. " You sent for me, Den—what is it ? " she asked.

" Collision, dearest. Somebody in trouble. I thought you would like to see what goes on." He turned sharply on his heel and cried out—" How's her head now ? "

" Nor'-nor'-east, sir," the helmsman sang out.

" Let her come to north-east by east and steady her on that ! "

" Aye aye, sir."

O'Hagan turned to Lucy, gripping her arm and marching with her to the dodger.

" I got the loom of her just now," he said. " She lies away there." He pointed over the starboard bow. " I don't know whether there is one or two or half a dozen— but something is perishing and we can't see. My luck ! perishing, mind, and we can't see ! " He stamped it out, staring round at that part of the horizon which should have shown the dawn and now was silvered.

" It's your chance, dearest ! " Lucy called in his ear, shivering, clutching his arm.

" Hist ! for God's sake. Evans is up here somewhere." He turned about. " How's her head now ? "

" Steadied on north-east by east, sir," came the answer.

" Half speed ! Slow ! "

From the bridge amidships Evans' calm voice reiterated the order—" Half speed—slow it is, sir."

O'Hagan breathed more easily.

The gong clanged.

"If," said Denis, his lips very near Lucy's small ear, "if I have a chance now I shall take it," he whispered, "unless . . . that is——"

She reached up, checking him, touching his lips.

"Take it, oh my darling . . . and—and God be with you," she answered him.

They gripped hands. The fog streamed past, making them one. Like a veil shaken and torn by the wind it drove between masts and funnel, and again it grew thinner. The light increased with each minute, and O'Hagan, conning his ship, took all risks as he drove her towards that smudge which now showed for what it was against the sky.

He halted near and whistled with long and short blasts, "I am sending boats," and through the megaphone repeated it.

A blur of sound drove down the wind to him—a roar no man could decipher.

"Full speed ahead!" came from O'Hagan's lips. "Starboard hard!"

The fog had become a mist under the sun's influence, and the engines thrilled as the old *Griselda* twisted her nose quite near the sinking vessel. "Stop! Steady helm!"

O'Hagan passed to the bridge wing and cried out, "Lower away there. Get off with you!" and from the near boat came Treegan's cheery shout—"Aye aye, sir! Down with her!"

There was but a moderate breeze, yet the swell ran steeply. The mate moved off with a fine flourish, but No. 3 was caught by the rail as the *Griselda* rolled down, and in a moment lay battered, sinking. The bo'sun and crew who manned her scrambled for the falls, and three reached. Two clung to the boat, treading water.

"Clear away No. 4! Quick there, lifebuoys overboard. Away and set them going, Evans—then come back here."

O'Hagan turned to the chief's boat, which was halting. "Go on!" he cried out. "Go on!"

And out there in the mist they faced the clamour was increasing. It became a moan. A hoarse cry from the throats of men tilting slowly into the sea, a bellowing roar from the boilers imprisoned below. It became one in aim and volume—a shout lifted to the dome; and as

suddenly it became broken, spasmodic; a brattle of shrieks and yells and bubbling groans.

The *Griselda* moved cautiously to the front, nosing her way in a littered sea. She crept up with her three small boats scouting ahead, picking up those who were seen. Men floated on chairs, on gratings, on lifebuoys; women clung here—children, groups of two and three, and some ducked as the boats drew near and passed screaming to their end. Treegan came alongside with a load. A man arrived swimming, but failed at the stroke which should have put him in safety. No one saw him. He sank without sound.

Out there in the mist a dog swam lustily, yapping as it faced the waves. Evans, as he drew near the ship, captured him and pulled him on board. He shook himself dry in the faces of those who saved him. The bo'sun's second charge crawled home, and as he sent up his load someone cried to the bridge—

"Dagos, sir," and again, in more detailed phrase, as he helped to push a child up the side—"Eye-talians, sir—every soul of 'em."

The mist fell upon them as they worked, and at a signal the boats came in and trailed astern. It grew thicker. It became so dense that, for a while, no further search could be made. The sea rolled lumpily out of a grey-green curtain. It ran cold. Under its soothing touch numbness intervenes and, sleepily, man succumbs.

They moved very slowly in a wide circle, searching seas which were strewn with oddments, buckets, chairs, mattresses, planks; but no victims until, suddenly, Treegan, who had climbed to the bridge, cried out—

"Yon's one!"

In a moment O'Hagan was at his side, staring with him at a face which slowly disappeared.

"Take charge!" O'Hagan ordered. "Call one of the boats up. I'm going."

With a cheery wave of the hand he climbed the rail and dived.

Lucy stood quite near, watching for him. Cold, still, with hands tightly gripping the rail, she awaited his reappearance. Treegan damned the world and He who made it. She paid no heed. Then with a faint "Hurra!" sat down quite close to the bridge rail and laughed, remembering that she was a man.

CHAPTER X

THE STAR ?

O'Hagan stood on the bridge again, re-clad after that sudden plunge into the depths, questioning what had come to him.

By hook or by crook, without much prescience, he had stumbled upon a disaster of some magnitude. A passenger vessel of sorts had gone down with " the side ripped out of her " by " some ship which had vanished in the fog "—and, out of a total of four hundred and thirty-three passengers and crew, the *Griselda* had contrived to pick up one hundred and seventy-three. This, at all events, was plain from a glance at her decks ; the rest was gleaned from statements made by those saved.

Some the Griseldians had plucked straight from the jumbled stress of rafts and gratings, buckets, buoys, and liner chairs ; others from the two boats which the shipwrecked crew had managed to launch ; others again by sheer gallantry, from the sea direct, after a dive. O'Hagan and young Evans shone here, O'Hagan having saved three and Evans two, while Treegan paced the bridge damning the duty which kept him dry.

And when all these things had been weighed, it became essential to search that fog-bound stretch of sea for others who might still be needing succour. Therefore the *Griselda* was kept cruising in a circle, her foghorn moaning, like a giant imprisoned and weary of attempted escape.

O'Hagan stood on the bridge looking down upon a strange scene, Lucy beside him. Through the steaming air it was possible to perceive groups of shaggy-headed men and drenched women. Some lay prone upon the deck while others bent over them, pumping with their arms. Some sat huddled beneath the rail, others stared out into the mist. The main hatchways were crowded with them, the bridge deck held a score ; cabins, forecastle, all were tenanted by these strange folk, who spoke the tongues of Southern Europe and were bereft. Blankets,

sail-cloth, a jumbled assortment of odd garments, clothed them. They looked up, dull and in fear, each time a gong clanged or the foghorn uttered a blast. A subdued moan moved through the dense grey air as the ship nosed about searching. A cry sometimes of despair, sometimes of fear, of hope, of misery, pierced the monotone they made. It was cold. It was impossible to see what came and went, and the hand of Death lay heavily on all.

Again O'Hagan stood alone on the bridge. Lucy had gone back to her task among the saved. She moved from group to group, talking haltingly in French with those who were able to respond. Treegan, Evans, the engineers, and men who could be spared from duty, went about rendering aid. People who had been dried in the stokehold and galley were brought on deck and others taken to the fires.

So it went on for hours, the *Griselda* slowly burrowing in the wall of fog, the hum of anguish, terror, despair always accompanying her as she continued her search; the clouds of wet air hiding her, clogging her movements, making aid hazardous.

So the day passed; night fell upon them—morning. Only the fog remained.

While O'Hagan was still three days from port, in clear weather, the *Carmania* came smoking up the lane from Liverpool, and, answering the *Griselda's* signals, slowed down and sent boats to relieve her of a portion of her burden.

This put heart into the wrecked people; it made it possible to compete with the pressure which had existed, and O'Hagan for the first time began to find himself. You cannot do much for Latins and Slavs if you have the linguistic attainments of the average Anglo-Saxon. It is especially difficult to deal with them when with very good reason they have decided that you, in point of fact, are the cause of their distress. That was the attitude of the majority of those saved, and it was impossible to combat it.

For O'Hagan, at the end of his tether financially, his home in the hands of those who conduct auctions, rates and taxes lying in store against him, the situation was pitiable. It was salvage this man had prayed for, the

opportunity of making money to relieve the strain which certainly tended to hamper him, and he found himself impaled instead by the horns of fame. Salvage would have found him both fame and dollars. It was a thing for which his owners, if it was fat and snug and not too costly in the winning, would give him praise. The Black List would see his name expunged—but he had earned public praise instead. A dubious inheritance, as sailors know. He might perhaps, as things were, win a star.

As a matter of fact, he had become famous while still he was forty-eight hours from New York. Stories of his gallantry, so they phrased it, and that of young Evans, given with wonderful fidelity by the *Carmania's* operator, had already appeared when the giant Cunarder herself arrived. From that moment until the entry of worn *Griselda*, sketches as well as words filled columns of the press in two continents.

Now the *Griselda* got herself into New York very early, and as she thought unobserved, on the seventeenth of September, to face a chorus which was in full swing. It brought a twinkle to O'Hagan's eyes and tears to Lucy's. With the characteristic emphasis of the greatest city in the New World, authorities had combined to give the Griseldians what they called " the time of their lives."

O'Hagan, in a general way, was not averse to the thing known as recognition ; but the sublime and unexpected manœuvres of New York's pressmen amazed him as greatly as did their narrative. It is vivifying to be snap-shotted and heroised in England ; it is quite another business in America.

A new feature arose, too, very early in the campaign which ensued. The *Griselda*, it was found, carried no means of speech but her flags, which were useless in a fog, and a whistle which was a " futile and archaic mode of making simple speech complex." New York decided, on the second day, while *Griselda* shivered in dock, that all ships should carry wireless installations, and became very busy ordering presidents and boards to make it compulsory.

They were busy, too, dissecting the news which had come by wireless and comparing it with the red-hot comments of people in a glow of language. Interviews and statements jostled each other out of all countenance. The Deed of yesterday became a Misdeed of to-day, the

marvellous prescience of O'Hagan something akin to negligence. There came in sequence the tributes and the diatribes, the criticism and the brushwork of many individuals suddenly become famous; suddenly blossoming as Judges before the most arbitrary Arbiter of modern days—Public Opinion.

The *flair* commenced when the papers got in touch with the *Carmania's* operator; but it became riotous when an officer of the *Salonos* announced that his ship had sent out distress calls which remained unanswered. O'Hagan, too, when he was questioned, admitted at once that although he had heard the foghorns of two vessels, he had no knowledge until he came actually among those who floated and swam, and heard the roar of steam and air, that anything serious had happened.

Then someone in authority spoke, and the Griseldians were held forth as an example for the sailors of all nations and of all time. America searched, in her newspapers, for precedent in this matter. It asked that a Star should be found which was unique and applicable to this deed; but none appeared. It became a question whether the States had power to grant decorations to individuals not of its race. It was discovered that in any case the acts had not been performed in the territorial waters of U.S.A. Newfoundland was the defendant Power, but Newfoundland, even if it admitted territorial jurisdiction, had no star.

Germany, it was said, found it wise to recognise heroism on the high seas. European nations generally, it was pointed out, had, locked up in their care, Orders and Ribbons which may be won by sailors; but the Power which should speak, which governed the speechless *Griselda*, gave no sign. It became recognised at length that no doubt England would speak some day. It was suggested that an Order in Council would be prepared and handed to Captain O'Hagan when he returned. Journalists said very plainly that England was governed by Orders in Council. They were not quite sure what these things were, but they instanced the fact that the Plimsoll Law which once ruled English shipping had been snuffed out by an Order in Council. They looked hopefully for the day when O'Hagan's countrymen should recognise his misdeeds. They were jovial cynics.

Then, in the midst of much talk, came a communication

from the Greek Government, which stated that the King was desirous of recognising the gallantry of those Englishmen who had come to the rescue of his subjects. The matter was made known in the correct way, with a flourish of trumpets, and O'Hagan sat down to await the arrival of very high honour, one of the highest at the bestowal of the Greek King, a lesser honour for young Evans, and a purse of gold for the rank and file of the Griseldians. The Greek Minister spoke feelingly and with grave appreciation of the signal duty which had fallen to him—and New York hummed content. Dinners were eaten, speeches made to which O'Hagan and Treegan and Evans replied, and the world rolled rosily for the Griseldians.

Then, at a final and lavish display of kindliness on the part of New York underwriters, while at dinner a message was handed to O'Hagan which made him blink. He visualised recognition from England at last. But it came from his owners and said—

"Well done *Griselda*. We are proud of you. SHARUMS."

No star on the horizon here.

Nothing from the country which should have been the first to speak. "We are proud of you—SHARUMS." The Department which rules shipping, silent. Perhaps it had not heard. The din at Whitehall no doubt was, and is, prodigious. Cotton wool is found necessary to stifle it.

Having failed to find dollars on the high seas, O'Hagan had, at all events, found kudos and the promise of a Star at the hands of Greece.

O'Hagan put the cable in his pocket and did what he could to enjoy his dinner; but to Lucy, when he reached her rooms up town that night, he confided the opinion that Sharum had joined the majority—which was only another way of saying that Sharum was mad. But Lucy knew that Denis was proud. She caught occasional lapses into self-consciousness. She knew that he thrilled when speakers related how he had dived "in full uniform" from the bridge and picked up a poor devil of a Pole, who kept shouting "Let go!"—"Let go!" and yet knew no English. She pictured to herself dear Den's full uniform, and the struggle it had been to find even one new suit for that voyage; and she pictured Den's face as he was hauled into the boat which came to his assistance, and heard his phrase as he climbed the rail to greet her with—"Got it this time, Brown," because there were those

present before whom it would not have been wise to expand.

For some time the people saved in this fashion continued in the belief that O'Hagan and the *Griselda* were the delinquents. In spite of the fact that no damage appeared, until a smashed grain-carrier crawled into Halifax nursing hurts which could not have been self-inflicted, the notion survived. Nor was it easy, even then, to explain to a congeries suffering as it had, that the colliding vessel had backed away, and had not been able to return because of the fog. But those who knew recognised the difficulty.

And now they heroised O'Hagan, Lucy decided he seemed to shrink. He objected to adulation, and said so. He repeated that if he had known what lay before him, he would have been too scared to act. Two hundred and sixty had perished after all. The sea bubbled faces. That was terrible. It pointed to imperfect methods. He told people that sailors were trained acrobats and accustomed to lightning rescues of the drowning. He took Lucy's hand and said, " This is the one thing for which we are untrained ; " then, after a small silence—" If only this had happened before the kiddie went," and sat down hopeless. It was plain that he was tired and wanted rest. He admitted, when questioned, that wireless telegraphy would be useful in " cargo-wallahs," but asked pathetically who would be expected to work it.

He said at the last dinner he was called to endure—" Make it compulsory that all ships shall be fitted with a Morse signalling lamp at the masthead, and you will enable ships to tell each other what they are going to do—anyhow, at night. For day work give me a semaphore. Half the collisions occur because there is no means of saying at once what a ship is going to do. The whistle should be subsidiary.

" There were minutes," he went on, " as I crept up to the sinking *Salonos*, when I could have flashed signals and she could have flashed replies to me. We might have done more so. You want something quicker than wireless in an emergency—you see what I mean ? Something that can be read in a moment by the officer of the watch. The Navy relies on flashlights and semaphore—why should not merchant ships use the same ? . . ."

Then someone pointed out that in a fog neither were of any service, and O'Hagan took up the challenge at once—

"Nothing is of much service when you cannot see. Even a wireless message is ineffectual in a fog. You may receive it—but what can you do ?"

There was no answer to this, and O'Hagan leaned forward to say—"Fog masters us. It ties us hand and foot. We cannot move very fast in it. We may not be able to move at all. Then we are at the mercy of those who care to take risks. . . . No, you cannot rely on sound signals—submarine electricity may help here, but not whistles. And," he lashed out, "if ships were built of tougher stuff than the modern steel, and with more appreciation of what they must endure, they would not sink before people had time to rub the sleep out of their eyes or get into their life-belts."

. . . .

After that dinner O'Hagan found his way up town to the house which sheltered Lucy. It was far from ships and the port of New York. It knew very little of sailors, and appeared content in its ignorance. It catered for people of small means who yet were travellers. It was plain, therefore, that Denis and Lucy had been at some pains to get out of the rut. They were Mr. & Mrs. O'Hagan, Den's captaincy sunk.

It seemed necessary, too, that when Lucy came ashore and it was evident she would be called upon to meet other women, that at her rooms she should be garbed as a woman. Men, she pointed out, smiling at her husband, may be puzzled by a woman masquerading as a man, but women would have her pinned out in an hour.

The difficulty of making a change failed to embarrass Lucy. Indeed, she seemed to have come equipped for it. On the second night of the *Griselda's* stay in dock, while they were still in a whirl of preparation for the fêteing so spontaneously arranged for them, she discarded the thick man's stockings she had worn with her Norfolk suit all day and drew on a pair of Lisle thread. She put on boots in which no man could walk. She donned an ulster which might belong to a person of either sex and, wearing a hat which only required the addition of a veil to make it womanly, stepped down the gangway to meet her husband, who waited at its foot.

Treegan, who saw her following the trunk which had

puzzled him when still they were in the London docks, had no suspicion that Mr. Brown was other than he appeared. He had, indeed, no very high opinion of that young man's capacities—" Ae wee bit saft," rather expressed the mate's view at the beginning, and the suggestion presently made by young Evans, that Mr. Brown was Mrs. O'Hagan masquerading as a man in order to be near her husband, produced mockery.

" Man ! ye must be wowf," came disdainfully to fluster the second mate and to put him on his mettle.

Treegan had discussed certain attitudes with young Evans, the second mate, and found them symptomatic " o' pairsons on the road ta the mad-hoose "—anyone, it appeared, who chose to voyage in a Tramp while there existed a single Cunarder, or a mile of beach to camp on, was more than " ae wee bit saft, he was looney." And as for the muffler and cap the man wore—" Weel, now, did ye no hear Captain O'Hagan explicate that ? " Then, after Evans had retired in silence to consider this, Treegan came near the binnacle, looked into it and said—" Starboard to your course ! Starboard—or I shall consider you one o' they new-fangled sailor-men wha get their trainin' in steam." A hit this at Evans and all those who have been compelled by modern conditions to voyage in steamers or remain on shore.

Ridicule rarely kills. It more often acts as an incentive. Suspicion is followed up until either proof or disproof is the result. And so here.

When Evans left the bridge on that occasion he came to his room and sat glumly considering the mate's exasperating tongue. He speculated, too, on the probable future of a man so gifted with blind reason. And while he sat there dangling straws he could not chew the steward came past. He stopped to make a suggestion concerning Mr. Brown. The matter naturally revolved in the ambit provided by the word lunacy on the one hand, and love on the other.

The second mate had his theories, so too had the steward. The thing had been broached before Treegan discovered so violent an objection to discussion, and on that occasion Treegan was pushed out, ostracised in name and inference by the two plotters who persisted in seeing ambiguity, salient or dormant, in the phrases of Mr. Brown and Captain O'Hagan.

On the night following that on which Lucy had gone ashore, just as Evans was ready to turn in, the steward tapped lightly on his door and entered. He carried a bread-basket under his arm, and in it a paper parcel. It contained nothing edible—just a pair of shoes, in point of fact, of the kind worn by women who know the value of dainty foot-gear.

The steward produced them with an eye to effect. He held them forth at length, the paper returned to the basket.

"What d'ye fink of that, sir?" he asked, all the conspirator in him to the front.

Evans knit his brows regarding this trifle. "Hum!" he said without sparkle, "rather decent. Where did you buy them?"

"I didn't buy 'em, sir—I *found* 'em," said the steward.

And still young Evans chose to be blind.

"Lucky beggar," he commented. "Where?"

"In the old man's room, sir, underneaf 'is bed," said the steward.

Evans puffed at his pipe, his forehead drawn into wrinkles, refusing inference, refusing, suddenly and for no apparent reason, to consider it, speak of it, know anything about what had led up to it. "Plotting against the old man" was the first cause in this new attitude; a meeting with Peter Witterspoon the motive which had brought first causes into prominence. "Plotting against the old man. A jolly good sort too . . . plotting with a flunkey!"

He blew a cloud of smoke and said with it—"No; I'm damned if I do." Then aloud, very much in Treegan's manner, "Ou, aye! I forgot to tell you. Captain O'Hagan asked me to see to them when he went ashore, but I forgot it. They got in his bag by mistake. Roll them together and put them on my settee. I'll send them in the morning."

"Send?" the steward ventured, his eyes narrowed, "to Mr. Brown, sir?"

"To Mrs. O'Hagan, Cap'n O'Hagan's wife. She came out in the *Carmania* and is staying across there at Jersey City," Evans snapped out, romancing without shame. "Put them down—paper and all. It will do to wrap them in . . . and clear out. I'm going to sleep."

The steward obeyed because he had no option. He

obeyed as an understrapper does, even in moments of vigorous protest, when he is on board ship; because no protest is possible. And when he had sacrificed the whole tangible result of his long espionage, he took up his basket and left the room. He looked sad. He acknowledged that he had made a mistake in taking Peter Witterspoon to the second mate's room. He put these ideas into phrases which should have scarified his officer—yet nothing came of it.

When Evans was alone he rose from his pillow, switched on the light and climbed to the settee. He took up the shoes and examined them, turned them over to look at the soles; nodded, rolled them up and placed them in a drawer, which he locked.

"Hers?" he asked softly of the farther bulkhead. "Of course they are hers."

Then with apparent disregard of the factor known as pay, which in his case at all events was microscopic, he said—"If I thought I could get a wife like her I'd marry to-morrow; damned if I wouldn't."

He kicked out, arranging his blankets with his feet, punched an unoffending pillow, and straightway sought sleep.

For the first night since the *Griselda's* entry into New York, the inactivity of the winches made this possible.

CHAPTER XI

THE SILENCE OF ENGLAND

PETER WITTERSPOON was in New York.

Peter Witterspoon sighing, his eyes dim, when all the world would have sworn the world was at his feet. "A man, sir," so goes the phrase, "who only has to hold up his finger if he wants a thing." "A man, whether you believe it or not, able to shake Wall Street or Royal Exchange and look round growling for some other thing to shake." That man sigh for a woman, cross the Pond on a journey which can bring him no nearer to her; bring him no smiles, no love—the thing plainly for which he starved?

In any case Peter Witterspoon was in New York.

He crossed in the Hamburg-Amerika flyer from Southampton because the more staid *Carmania* was unable to minister to his desire for speed. And he missed the chance of a lifetime when the Cunarder came swiftly in the track of over-crowded *Griselda* and took from her those half-clad Italians, Greeks and Slavs who dared a new transhipment. He crossed after a week spent in seeking at Riverton and elsewhere, with the aid of Mrs. Faulkner, Lucy's hiding-place; then he came back to Bearsted Road to interview the husband of the lady who provided beefsteak and kidney pies for her "guests" on Empire Day.

Mr. Shandon was a person who seldom appeared. He lived in the shades, and when Peter Witterspoon discovered him he admitted that London could get on very well without him. But he was a longshoreman, a person versed in many strange practices still found possible near the creeks and gullies of the Isle of Dogs.

By the transfer of certain coins bearing his Majesty's effigy in golden relief, Peter Witterspoon discovered that Lucy had packed a trunk, labelled it "Mr. T. Brown," and sent it by Carter Paterson, *viâ* Mr. Shandon, to the *Griselda*. Mr. Shandon proved delivery of the trunk;

he proved that later—" after the pubs was closed I took an' showed Mr. T. Brown 'ow to get froo into the docks.

" I 'ailed a cab," said Mr. Shandon, " an' come down to the edge o' the wharf, take yer oaf, an' just took T. Brown be the arm an' took 'im aboord. Then ee give me ten bob an' I quit. 'Oo was ee ? " Mr. Shandon became confidential ; he winked. " Oo are you lookin' for, anyw'y ? Mrs. O'Agan ? Well, T. Brown's 'er . . . Rummy, ain't it ? Take yer oaf !

" Ho yus ! I know you, sir . . . no need fer intaladuction 'ere. I see you time an' agen wiv 'er . . . see yer motors . . . see you w'en you fought no one's in the bloomin' street . . . see yer w'en you tike 'em all aw'y to Hepping ; but you never see me. Not it. That's my biz—to keep out o' sight, an' it's a job I can do. . . . Know yer ? Lord lumme ! if I didn't know yer d'ye fink I'd let on wot 'appened to 'er as st'yed 'ere wiv my missis an' los' 'er kid ?

" Take yer oaf ! " said Mr. Shandon with energy ; but not in the way of asseveration it appeared by the context. " But Lord ! hif my wife, wot's fair balmy on that kid wot they los', knew as I went gallifantin' along the docks wiv *'er* dressed like a man . . . well, there, it wouldn't be 'ome no longer."

Mr. Shandon drew the back of his hand across his lips, transferred the price of many dead-enders to the flap of a singularly open pocket, touched his forelock and repeated again—" Take yer oaf ! "—this time in answer to a suggestion from Peter Witterspoon.

Sharum, Cockspur Street, and a state room in the Hanging - gardens - Ritz - Delmonico mailship *Asterias* brought Peter Witterspoon without undue fatigue to New York.

He came down to the *Griselda* on Sunday when young Evans was the officer in charge and complimented him on his gallantry. He explained that he had an interest in Sharums, Limited, and slowly brought the conversation to track Mr. Brown. Evans, with the mystery of that strange person burning him, told his visitor what he knew, described Mr. Brown, said where he was to be found, and afterwards spoke harshly of his indiscretion to Treegan. But that philosopher reminded him it was " nae use bleatin' over wet sea-boots, the thing tae do was ta dry them oot."

But Evans was unable to dry them, " oot or in."

Lucy O'Hagan took grave risks when she decided to evade her aunt's *protégé* and face the sea with her husband. Witterspoon waved a wand and arrived curled, ready to prosecute a siege ; ready, at all events, to decide whether a siege were possible, ready to take Lucy in his arms and give her the purse of a Rascallion—if she would take it.

But Lucy O'Hagan, daughter of a man who had fallen in defence of his country's honour, wife of one on his way to receive the chronometer-balanced stop-watch which is England's notion of a Mercantile Marine V.C., was not alive to the advantages offered by the epicure son of a man strong enough to build up a fortune by the manufacture of pills, and weak enough to leave it in that son's hands.

It came out at their first encounter up there at her rooms, whither he had pursued her, waited for her, caught her.

She stood flushed, astonished and very beautiful in his eyes, angry at the manner of his insistence.

" Why are you here ? " she asked. " Who told you where to find me ? "

" I am here, dear lady, because it would be death to stay away," he pronounced evenly.

" It might be death to stay," she panted, her face suddenly aflame at his tone.

" I would welcome it," he bowed, " if by dying I could do you a service."

" I—we have no desire for your services. We are happy in fighting for ourselves," she told him, but he came nearer and said quickly—

" You may not be able to fight for yourselves. Circumstances may be too strong for you. You are a woman. You are not fitted for this life. Why did you not remain in London as I urged ? I had very grave reasons for giving you that advice. If I could have foreseen it, your husband would not have been here either. It—it is a very difficult question. I don't care about discussing it, even with you. It may be quite untrue. I am unable to say . . . but I did expect you would rely to some extent on my judgment. Instead of that you come here dressed as a man, by Jove ! and—oh ! I say, isn't that rather overdoing the part ? "

"I don't pretend to follow you," she said in tones which conveyed to his intelligence just how little she missed.

"Never mind. The point is that I want you to give up this trip. Your aunt is seriously concerned about it, and I want you to promise you will not go back in the *Griselda*. I would get you to persuade your husband to come out of her too, if I thought there was the smallest chance of his doing so. . . . Oh! I bow down before your husband—believe me, I have no intention or desire to belittle him. He has done a fine work finely and the Royal Humane Society should recognise what he has done . . . but, look here, Mrs. O'Hagan, it is no use beating about the bush, I do not want you to sail on the *Griselda* again. It gives me the jumps to consider it. Wait till O'Hagan has a decent ship . . . I will work all I know for him—'pon honour I will—although I know it will not bring you nearer to me. I would give him command of my yacht if I thought he would take it, and you could sail in her till the world turns blue; but, for God's sake, don't go round in these miserable Tramps even to be near your husband. It isn't fair . . . 'pon honour it isn't . . . yes?"

He held his breath because with a sudden wave of impatience she interpolated his name. "Yes, I beg your pardon?"

Lucy faced him, her cheeks aflame, certain that she must come to the bottom of this matter. "Why do you pester me?" she cried out. "Why—why?"

"Do I pester you?" he exclaimed.

"Isn't it plain?" she commented. "You choose a moment when you know my husband is away; you force your society upon me—here in New York where I came to escape you. You put me in difficulty, try to spoil my life, make me act meanly . . . why do you do it—why, why?"

"Because I love you," said Peter Witterspoon instantly, "and nothing else counts."

"Love!" she mocked, angry instantly at this madness; but he interrupted, beat her down—

"You made me love you. I had no option in the matter. You were kind to me in India . . . I danced with you at Simla. You remember?"

"In India you were a gentleman," she said, still in

tones of mocking comment, wondering if he would find the inference.

"You asked me why I follow you," he pleaded, "and when I tell you, you twit me with lack of breeding. I am what I am. I love you because of yourself, if you like that better. I wish to save you, if you will permit me to force that view. I wish to help you . . . and, oh, my God! can't you see that I will wait for you, pray for you, see you whenever my money will aid me; with your consent or without it, now or at any time in the future, while I live." The passion of these words consumed him, and for a moment he was quiet.

Lucy watched him with growing fear.

"What is convention to you or me?" he questioned again, his tongue loose amidst phrases and thoughts which had pursued him even as he had pursued Lucy. "What are shibboleths to any educated man or woman—love comes first, does it not? Is it not the mastering flame? Do you pretend that the fulminations of bigots, aimed solely at keeping their little perch *in situ*, trouble you . . . are you afraid?"

She laughed because she was afraid, because Peter Witterspoon in this guise was incomprehensible, but mainly because she was afraid, as any young thing is, of passions it does not understand.

She knew that Peter Witterspoon was the controlling force in that business which had first wrecked her husband and now given him the opportunity for which he had prayed and striven. She knew that Sharum would never have done what he had without compulsion, and there was gratitude in this young girl's heart in spite of the laugh.

"Aren't we here to live our lives and gather as many roses on the way as possible?" he pressed upon her. "For a man in love—love is," he enunciated. "He is the slave of a passion all too rare among men. A man who will not follow where love beckons is unworthy the name of man."

He moved up and down the room before her, pointing the way he had come.

"I admit my insignificance, my *dilettante* attitude; but I do not admit your right to scorn me because of it. Your husband is great and noble in your eyes; if I were in his shoes I should not be satisfied with that." He

shrugged over this, scorn now in his tone, but instantly suppressed. "I do not ask you to leave him. I merely beg for your very kind consideration at such moments as you can spare from him. I ask to be allowed to come sometimes to see you. To meet your husband and your friends. I ask to be one of your party. . . . For the rest, I can wait, although, God knows, that is bitterness in being. . . ."

He halted some paces distant, obviously distressed, and Lucy said, with less sting than before—

"I am sorry. You must believe me when I tell you that . . . oh, well! if I had guessed in India what——"

He came swiftly to her feet at this, kneeling beside her.

"Yes—yes—yes?" he cried out.

"What you tell me now," she continued steadily, "I should have avoided you."

"Avoided me—why?"

She drew back. "Isn't it obvious? Oh, be quiet!" she begged. "Be a man! If these people hear you . . . there are no doors here."

He rose from her side and stood hungrily looking down at her.

"It is because I am a man that I hate and loathe your marriage," he raged. "O'Hagan stole you from me. I might have won if he had not been near. . . . Nonsense! I can't put it aside. Don't I tell you I love you? Don't you comprehend what that means to a man like me? Can't you guess? It is heaven or it is hell for some of us—and, I think, I could have made it heaven for you. . . ."

He crossed again, drawing near, and in an instant Lucy moved to the exit and called out.

He caught her by the arms too late and leaned down, whispering—

"When the man comes, order a glass of lemonade, iced water—anything."

"And if I refuse?" she returned, flinching.

"I shall hold you in my arms and kiss you. . . ."

She struggled to free herself, crying out—"Coward! Coward!"

"Promise—he is coming," he insisted, his lips very near.

With a sudden slackening of endurance she bowed, crossed to a chair, and sat down, white and scared. Peter Witterspoon found a chair which rocked. He swayed

restfully to and fro, his breath giving evidence of the stress he endured.

A negro servant entered, received his order, passed out, and returned carrying a tray. With the intuition of one whose province it is to wait on others he read the signs, set the glass before Peter Witterspoon and withdrew, pocketing a coin.

"That," said Lucy, with frigid contempt, "was cowardly —you are a cur, you understand?"

"Dear lady," he smiled in spite of a dawning fear, "even your whip is worth striving for."

He stood up, searching her face. He recognised that with some women this would have been an interlude; but with Lucy O'Hagan it was the end.

"You promised to stay behind when you were in London," he complained, catching at straws, "but you did not keep your word."

"I promised, as you term it," she answered, her eyes suffused, "because I could not escape in any other way. If I could have trusted you I might have stayed . . . but how was that possible when you showed me every minute you only thought of yourself?"

Her eyes filled, and she ended on a rush of trouble —"Can't you understand that I love my husband? Isn't that sufficient explanation . . . of—of my being here?"

Her anguish touched him as perhaps no other mood could. He discovered he had been to blame. It dawned upon him that he had behaved like a cad, like a cur, as she had said. That hurt him. He could not explain his action. A child could have shamed him here. A philosopher could have put him in touch with the truth. But Peter Witterspoon, fumbling with the new jargon of irresponsibility, said "it had come over him." Obvious even to the sterility who mistakes passion for love. It was contemptible—contemptible.

He explained in a voice vibrating very much as he desired—

"I wanted to do you a service. I wanted to persuade you to leave the *Griselda*, because she is not safe. You understand?—not safe. But I spoil everything I touch—except gold. That accumulates. I have too much gold; but you who have so little will not let me help. Your suspicion maddened me." He had it now; tightly he

gripped it. "Maddened me in spite of myself. And now you are angry with me. . . ."

He looked for some negation here, but Lucy remained silent, bowed over the sofa end.

He took up his hat and stick. "Won't you forgive me?" he pleaded.

Her shoulders moved. She strove for control and said —"How can I? How can I? Let me think," her mind busy on the advice he had given.

He still lingered, watching her, shaken by the knowledge that this was the end. He put it to the test, his voice pitched low—

"May I come again . . . may I call?"

"No—no! Go away . . . please go away."

"I will write," he announced. "I must get your forgiveness. I will not trouble you again, unless you call me."

With that he left her. He became quite sure that he had made a very dignified exit.

How much to tell Den, how little to tell him, very soon became the question over which Lucy puzzled.

She was so young, so inexperienced, so alone. She loved her husband, and was pathetically certain of his love; but she had no woman friend. She remembered Den's face that night when last Peter Witterspoon had come between them. She dreaded that look. The appalling indifference it showed, even in the face of death, to her presence, astonished and bewildered her. She could not fathom the meaning of his silence as he kneeled over their dead child. It was not anger. It would be absurd to describe it as insensibility. It was a stiffening, a momentary holding back from all communion with one who, for some reason, he seemed to consider unworthy.

Lucy could not read Peter Witterspoon with the knowledge of a man; she could not class him as one she might not trust, whom she must keep always at a distance. And chance had so ordered it that he, in a sense, held her in his power. There was nothing occult about this, no indiscretion or stupidity of youth, but just the fact that Peter Witterspoon was the controlling force, as she understood it, in the company which owned *Griselda*. That is to say, he had sufficient influence to insist, in answer to her prayer, on some sort of tardy justice being shown to one who had been harshly treated.

The man's immense wealth oppressed her. She imagined him juggling with life and death; pursuing her until Den grew restive and turned. She dreaded that moment, which might so easily come. It drugged her faculties and made her, as a little while ago she would have said, "see snakes where only jungle grass existed." She decided to tell Den everything, after an hour's thought. She crossed to Battery Park and revelled in the glorious outlook, the Hudson blushing, the ships all purple above, all fire to seaward; she returned to meet him at the restaurant at which they were to dine, resolute not to burden him more, to tell him what was essential. Then, after a jovial greeting, she noticed a shade on Den's face which called for comment.

She leaned forward over their table and said in that confidential fashion he loved—"No bothers, oh dearest?"

"Only Peter Witterspoon has come over," he said evenly. "He was on the ship yesterday—chattering as usual, so I am told."

"I know," she choked. "I was going to tell you. He has been up."

"To see you? Oh, well—what does he want?"

"He wants you to give up the ship—and he wants me not to go home in her."

"Hum! Has he any proposal to make as to what I am to do if I leave the ship?" he asked in sarcastic comment.

"He says he will find you a ship which is worthy of you. He calls the *Griselda* a tramp—or he would give you command of his yacht and let me sail with you."

O'Hagan looked up, thoughtful, quiet, as was his fashion. "We couldn't do that, could we, Mem-sahib?"

"No."

"Then if he comes again, tell him to mind his own business."

"He will not come again, my husband," she said, serene in her confidence to read. Then swiftly leaning near, she touched his hands. "Is the ship safe?" she asked, her face alight, the index of her love.

"Safe? Oh, yes—why?"

"I heard something. . . ."

"From Witterspoon?" he frowned.

"No—in dock. Before we sailed, you know."

"What was it?"

"Something about deckloads, oh dearest."

He replied a shade more thoughtfully—"I understand there will be none this trip . . . but, in any case, I believe she will do our turn. She is old, I admit, but there are lots worse at sea. Pray God we may never have to sample them."

And that ended Lucy's attempt to explain the inexplicable, to get Denis' confidence in this matter which slowly assumed proportions which threatened her peace and his. Den hated the name or sight of Peter Witterspoon; but Lucy could not suppose he was jealous.

He was not. He was too sane for jealousy. He could not look in eyes which lighted at his approach and find room for doubt. He knew that Peter Witterspoon had given him his ship. He knew that Lucy found the motive power which drove him—and he remembered from deep in the past, that David, when he had looked upon Bathsheba, made Uriah the bearer of a letter ordering Joab to place him in the thick of the fight, and to retire so that the enemy might slay him.

But here Denis O'Hagan permitted imagination to sway him. He saw Peter Witterspoon in the light of a modern David, searching out means for the removal of one who stood between him and happiness. He saw Lucy as one but dimly conscious of a pursuit which she did nothing to foster. He saw her in her beautiful purity and faith still turning to the man who had been unable to provide her with means to save her child. He saw himself cloyed by difficulty, unable even now to render to a wife the love and gentleness which were her due. He knew that these things beat a man down, make him boorish, forgetful, impatient; therefore, he refused to smudge Lucy's soul by argument, or to give a handle to suspicion by vengeance.

Peter Witterspoon, for good or for ill, had come once more into their lives, and they had to face his presence. What was, was. What would be, would be. No fighting could alter that, no stupid pitting of muscle against muscle, force against force. If wit could win, he would win; if not, he would be snuffed out. It is written—and we are the children of Him who wrote.

Denis O'Hagan had all the Celtic vice of introspection. He had all the Celtic headiness of a victory won in dreams. And against him was set Peter Witterspoon.

Dull, too, this business man, in the sense of soul knowledge; dull, and likely to remain unkindled by his trappings of millions. If Peter Witterspoon moved out of his groove the world groaned somewhere. If, because of a perceived injustice, he withdrew investments, somewhere in dim tenements tortured hinds cried to the God who ordered life. If, in view of a whim or scruple or risk, he gave orders to his brokers to move capital, the small and the great, the worker and the man of leisure—all were touched, perhaps by death, perhaps by want.

Peter Witterspoon, dull or not, could read these things truly; but he was unable to read in Lucy's glance a soul in arms. He only saw eyes that dazzled him. He could not gauge the fear she had lest some clash should spoil Den's chance now that he had won fame. He could not know that she lived for the recognition of that wonderful act of Den's, because, in Peter Witterspoon's eyes, no wonderful act appeared. He deprecated openly the stir which had been made, and Sharum presently wrote at some length to explain that if all ships were compelled to carry wireless installations, then good-bye to the present boom.

Peter Witterspoon suffered from mental indigestion. He was weary of ships and would gladly be quit of them. He moved in the limelight of New York's home life as one of the world's great ones. If the ability to write fat cheques constitutes greatness, then was he great; but at this moment of pained abstention Peter Witterspoon more nearly approached the Temple gates than at any other period.

He wrote to Lucy begging her to give him peace by sailing in the Cunarder, and received an answer from O'Hagan which troubled him more. He replied by stating that he had been in communication with Sharum, who cabled that Mrs. O'Hagan might accompany her husband if she desired to do so. Then he washed his hands and took ship for the West Indies.

So the tides moved for these three out there in the keen airiness of the New World. Ebb and flow. The ordered sequence of mutable things.

. . . . .

Now the *Griselda*, which was to carry these two to the Motherland, slowly got herself unladen, cleaned, and commenced methodically to take in those cases and casks which are known as cargo, without which the English

nation, of all others, would go hungry to bed. How deep she would be when all was shipped remained uncertain. Whether a deckload would be added to increase her jauntiness, one could not discern. There came a whisper about "Logs and tallow which would have to go on deck," but the notion fizzled. O'Hagan gave no sign.

The papers, too, had quite forgotten in the pressure of events that the *Griselda* at any time had occupied attention. She seemed a very ordinary specimen of British Trampdom, or Linerdom, whichever it happened to be; nothing in any sense heroic or masterful. Sometimes her nose was in the air, sometimes her tail. She was painted in sections. She had a big list to port to-day, a list to starboard to-morrow. There was no sort of certainty which end of her would be prominent the day after to-morrow. She looked sometimes like a scow, and sometimes gave the idea of razor-like proportions hidden by the water and the scum and the floating filth of a dock.

She had received, as far as New York was concerned, her baptismal fire; and somebody would see that she was duly recognised in the world's blue books. In the phrase of the country which received her fees, she was already a back number. It is possible she resented this, considered it an indignity. It may have explained her ungainly attitudes, but it did not explain why, when these eccentricities had been acknowledged, her name again filled space in the papers, or why Treegan and young Evans stood damning in the bridge.

"Look at this!" said Treegan.

He twisted the paper and Evans stared obliquely down its columns. He read out the staring headlines:—

"The Griselda Again.

Withdrawal of Promised Orders.
Substitution of
Others.
Tin for Gold.
Action of British Government.
Captain O'Hagan's
Position.
His Views.
Ours."

Treegan read this out with characteristic emphasis. Evans commented.

"Seems to me," said the chief, "someone's bein' diddled."

"I have it in writing," Evans announced, "and I'll hold 'em to it."

"Hold? Who?"

"The Greek Minister."

"You canna," said Treegan with decision. "He's just a wee understrapper body like the rest of us, an' has tae do as he's telled."

"I'm thinking," said Evans after further investigation, "that the chaps who handled cash come best out of this swim."

"Recht!" Treegan made answer. "When it's a case o' medals vairsus solatium for the British sailor, grab hold o' solatium. There's a taste tae solatium; the ither," he shrugged out, "is, weel—it's maybe here an' it's maybe there. I'm no enamoured o' buttons when they're gee'n tae save folks brass."

That may be taken as the considered opinion of the two officers; but not of their captain. Their case was simple, his complex. The escutcheons of Treegan and Evans had received new lustre; O'Hagan's retained its smudge. No heartening message had come from England, no word of commendation from those who had judged him. For O'Hagan the news produced heartache. It seemed almost as though Authority, in spite of Captain Worsdale, pursued him of set purpose. He questioned whether Witterspoon was at the back of it; but made no allusion to his suspicions. Yet the thing stood over him as a set-back.

Lucy had no love for newspapers, and now that Den's name no longer appeared she neglected them entirely. In consequence she was ignorant of the present comment.

She had discovered that Den was oppressed and less ready to smile. She caught a strained look in his eyes on occasion, and she recognised the almost pathetic tenderness he showed her. It was as it had been during the days of his trial at Jake Hall, and again during the long probation at Glasgow. She wondered. Her nights became restless.

They moved about this new city which neither knew, staring at the evidences of wealth and prosperity, but the

spot they loved best of all was Battery Park with the marvellous bay, Governor's Island, the Statue of Liberty and wonderful procession of ships coming and going—vanishing up the Hudson, up East River and sinking in the seaward haze. Together they ascended to the topmost storey of the Singer Building and gazed upon New York, came down to the street and stared up. They stood on Brooklyn Bridge and crossed searching out new points of view, and they saw it all with the avidity of children who presently must say farewell. The flashed advertisements over Broadway entranced them—it was a show, a show, and they were seeing it all for the first time, with the idea looming in their minds that it also would be the last.

So they came hand in hand to their final week and stood for a memorable hour watching from their favourite Battery Park the sunset dying behind New Jersey Heights. The lights were already twinkling on river and on shore; the afterglow had passed and the mammoth buildings, stealing ships and shadowed walks were tinged with crimson. Afar off was the roar of a City's railways, the clang of bells mellowed by distance. Occasionally a hooter sounded, but the moment was one of peace—a peace which seemed fantastic, which presently would be dispelled by the brooding Force towering over all in the flaming west.

Denis linked Lucy's arm and drew her close. "It looks wicked," he said softly, "wicked—and we must go."

"Back to the homeland, dearest," she answered, her cheek on his shoulder, "back to claim your Star."

"Back to the fight," he swiftly told her. "Back to make them eat their words if not their acts. There is no star for sailors, no honour but the thing any man may win who walks into a pond to save a drowning cat. Let it lie. It is not worth the value of the suit I swam in."

"But—but, oh dearest, there is the Star of Greece. You won it! I saw you win it. . . ."

"Quite true—yet even that, it appears, we may not receive."

Something in his manner made Lucy shiver. She clung tightly to his arm, her eyes on his in the fading light.

"But the Greek Minister said at the banquet——" she began; then halted, and added brokenly, "What has happened now, oh my darling? Tell me."

He faced her there within sound of the sea, only a short distance from the scene of his triumphant entry into New York, and said, more calmly than before—

"The King of Greece has been talked to by our Board of Trade and Foreign Office. These folk look upon Orders as things to be worn by permanent officials and Under-Secretaries of State, so that they may be decked and envied when they march through London crowds to a *levée*. If sailor men wore them they would be valueless. Besides, owners object to skippers with the rank of a baronet. Sharum or Witterspoon—somebody has objected—and the Board of Trade, which is the humble and very obedient servant of all who have a union to back them, has made representations. Result? Oh, the usual thing, dear child. I go down. Young Evans goes down. In deference to our Government's wish, the Greek Government propose to bestow 'third class' rank instead of 'first.' Tinfoil instead of gold . . . and, as far as I am concerned, it may keep it—eat it—put it where a monkey puts the nuts."

Lucy clung to him in silence. Throbbing though, her heart bowed before this supreme littleness. She seemed stunned. Perhaps the bitterness he betrayed added to her sense of fear. It appeared, indeed, that England delighted in tricking the men who feed her as well as those who fight her battles.

"You shouldn't have married a sailor, Kiddy," he said, as she waited, searching for light. "A sailor can't climb. He is the wrong type to begin with. He has *Wanderlust* in his blood. He lives for the open spaces, for the wilds, and the acquisition of dollars is—is very difficult for him . . . sorry I'm a sailor, oh dearest. It handicaps you."

She took his mood instantly, and looked up with smiling eyes, very near the sad, stern face he showed her.

"It is I who handicap you," she faltered.

"You—little witch?"

"Me," she decided, her hands firm on his arm.

"Then I love my handicap," he laughed. "May the good God find me no worse!"

And so they passed throbbing into the night which had closed upon them.

CHAPTER XII

MINATORY

THE *Griselda's* winches clattered. Shouts from the throats of frowsy Italians, working slave-like in the home of freedom, added to the jangle. Strange orders, stranger epithets, made havoc of America's claim to assimilate all nations. Grouped in the glare of clustered lights men shouted and jeered in Italian and Spanish forward of the bridge, and wrestled with casks and Teutonic gutturals abaft it.

New York stevedores know their business. There is little mixing of Latin, Teuton or Slav in the gangs which handle cargo. They avoid a confusion of tongues lest the seal of the Tower should be added to their difficulties.

The *Griselda* sweated steam at every pore. She had the appearance of a vast hive in the hands of a bee-master preparing to collect honey. The steam he used to still the bees' anger ascended in jerks and jets, and hung over the lights in wreathing columns. And through it came the cries of the bees, the hum, the buzz, the scream and clash of the honey jars.

An orgy of collection, storage, and trundling made way there in the steam. The bee-master swore. The bees who, it appears, refused to be assimilated or asphyxiated, swore too ; the jargon they created rose through the steam and, carried by the breeze, met the jargon of other workers on other hives, and passed, groaning, to the heavens. And the stars which light America's night looked down twinkling upon the world of men as who should say " What a fuss they make—these children ! what a madness is their vaunted civilisation ! Send rain ! Send rain to cool them ! "

The rain came in generous stream ; but it only added to the din, to the risks, to the shouts and oaths in Italian, Spanish, German, until a sling slipped. Then, in sudden frenzy of silent work, men gathered together two still Lithuanians and carted them on wheels into the night.

The *Griselda's* scuppers spouted rain, gurgling approval.

"Hither we come,
Throbbing we come,
Out of the slums where they sing
Death to the Rule of a King.
Over the sea,
To the Land of the Free,
Prepared to be Scholars,
To earn you good Dollars,
We have come!
Oh God! We have come."

The *Griselda* was rushed—that is all. It became necessary, at the last moment, lest freight should be stolen by some German or French or Italian barbarian competitor, to add to *Griselda's* burden a deckload of casks and things which might not legally be placed in her hold. O'Hagan saw the agents. He might with equal benefit have seen the Statue of Liberty, or said a litany to the boss of Central Pacific Railroad. For this is a matter which is outside the jurisdiction of British shipmasters. It is arranged in cabinets and offices far from the high seas or the docks. It is part of the Law of Exchange, which is the natural outcome of all development. It is part of the process which keeps fed the heart of that Great Empire which beats so calmly amidst the floundering ships that paddle and screw and tack to keep it warm—ships which clothe it, aid in its defence, draw close the scattered clansmen and get for their guerdon the lectures and sneers of an amazing neglect.

O'Hagan was a Bottle-filler; Treegan, Evans and the crew of the *Griselda*, down to the tapered indignity and tail of things known as "the boy," were Bottle-fillers. They were there to fill the nations' crocks and pans, even as the Lithuanians, Slavs, Italian and Spanish emigrants are, in New York, Chicago, and all other giant cities of civilised hustle, to fill the crocks and pans of America. How these things are filled is of small importance. Fill them. If you "peg out" in the process there are others, hungry, aching to step into your shoes. If you become mad in the process, do we not supply, out of our great-hearted benevolence, asylums where you may be caged lest you do yourself an injury? If you become broken on the wheel, have we not prepared places where you shall be made whole—do we not dower and speechify over the question of our provision—so that you may be mended, patched,

prepared to take again your place in the ranks, on crutches or in a go-cart ?

Out of the dark we come. Through the dark we march blindfold to accomplish destiny. Into the dark we return.

Lucy O'Hagan was one of the wanderers here. Denis O'Hagan, Treegan, Evans—all were wanderers, all in the hands of an unavoidable Fate, shackled, bound, not like Ixion for a vile attempt on Hera, but to a flaming wheel known as the Law of Supply and Demand. To the jugglery and injustice and unseen misery of Competition.

Lucy O'Hagan on that night of storm and breaking lay for the last time where she could see the lights of Freedom which gleam over New York, the sky signs which proclaim in arresting flashes the beneficence and cheap gaudery of hustler tradesmen. She lay awake because Den was absent. She pretended the lights gave her solace because they gave her company.

In that fashion it is quite easy for a time to score off self. But the girl, like her husband, was tired of the even acknowledgment of failure, the dull and exasperating crunch of the thing they fought. And now, it appeared, poor, tired old *Griselda* must carry as a deckload weight which would make her crank.

Treegan the authority here—for O'Hagan had tested her only in fine weather. Crank ? " Ou aye, more than ae trifle, I'm thinkin', but a dorlach to the stack o' last voyage. She wull do . . . she wull do."

There was all the " differ," he explained to young Evans, between " ninety tons o' top weight and one hunner an' seventy-five." " Given ordinair weather she wull carry it grand . . . wi un-ordinair weather she might clear her decks. Ou aye ! an' us."

This by degrees came to Lucy's ears. In jibs and jabs, as it were, of talk the whole press and circumstance was put before the girl who had decided to follow the fortunes of a man who was a Bottle-filler. She learned that the steward had disappeared because of it, that the bo'sun and two of the hands were missing for the same reason, and that Treegan minimised the hatred he had for deck-loads because he was married and could not run.

But O'Hagan said nothing after that one call on his agents. He might resign. He might indeed do any of the fool actions open to persons entangled in the cogs of

Supply and Demand. He might apply for a cage in one of the asylums put up by Philanthropy—and get it, by simulating madness. Otherwise he must keep his teeth shut, get out his sextant, determine his compass errors, and start on his way for the Homeland.

These were some of the lessons Lucy had learned during her coverture. She had seen the Trial at Jake Hall, and had suffered, under its sentence, even to the loss of her child and her home; yet they made no great impression on her as she lay considering the companionship of the lights of New York. They kept her awake—that is all. But then Den was awake too, watching at the docks the final straws as they were placed on *Griselda's* back; wondering, as Lucy wondered, why in the world she did not kick them off Here.

Ten o'clock on a glum day with the wind making talk in the squat masts of adjacent "liners"; the sea blown white on the Jersey shore, spitting, no doubt, on Sandy Hook; and Lucy coming on board boldly by day clad in the garb of her sex.

The ulster which had taken Tom Brown from the steward's scrutiny still cloaked her; she wore the same cap-like hat, the same small boots and gaiters; but the dark eyes glanced to-day through a veil which in some way seemed part of the grey fox fur which nestled round her neck.

Treegan would know, young Evans would know; but they were white men, accustomed to the sea, and full of a seaman's reverence for women. O'Hagan introduced his officers with a word which made them Lucy's slaves and his. No difficulty to-day in reaching the *Griselda*, no tribulation or uncertainty on the score of Peter Witterspoon; all misadventure swept away now that she stood on the bridge, listened to the song of the wind, and the haunting dread of pursuit was ended.

"Free!" she turned to O'Hagan as they crept past Battery Park. "Good-bye, New York! Good-bye, sky-scrapers, sky-signs, most wonderful Hudson, good-bye! Free! oh dearest, to be with you!"

O'Hagan turned to face her and saw lips very firm, eyes brilliant in a face suffused but at peace.

"Free?" He smiled back his hand a moment on her arm. "Aye—just that!"

They moved down the bay in face of a breeze which whipped small wavelets into white turbulence, listening to the scream it made over the land. They crept down the Narrows, bowed to their first swell off Coney Island—then on through channels, skirting buoys, till Sandy Hook lay astern and the purple waters of North Atlantic climbed in hills to obstruct their passage.

Half way to Nantucket night drew the curtain upon them with the solemnity of a Moslem spreading his carpet for prayer. It came sedately upon clouded heavens, peeped a while through windows which blazed upon the track *Griselda* made; lighted her, made her ruddy amidst the hills she traversed and went out.

From the man perched on the forward bridge came the cry of those who watch as one struck the bell—"Light's bright and all's well!"

Griselda acknowledged it by a plunge which left the deck white, gurgling, like water in a tank which has stirred.

The sound of slopping seas accompanied her in her march towards the dawn.

So, for days and nights the *Griselda* faced those slogging rollers with the patience of all driven things. She plunged, reared, tossed back the brine and climbed again. A gale sang in her ears; but it lacked sting, lacked force. There was no venom in the squalls, none of the couched fury of intent. It blew from the north where already the land was white and snow-girt. Its breath was cold—cold as the comfort of those who moved in dull sequence from the wheel to the look-out and from look-out to forecastle.

A chill cave this rest-house, feeding-house of *Griselda's* crew; triangular, built of steel and grimed with the scourings of dead and gone sailor-men. It lay in the eyes of the ship, but eyes it had none. Blinkers screwed hard upon round portlets admitted water, but obstinately kept out light. Just a grim cave for Jack to shelter in, seek sleep in, consume that giant bill of fare which Parliament has ordained that he shall eat. A place where he may mend his torn "duds," wash his shirt, dry his oilskins, smoke his pipe and launch blood-stained talk at the men who are his watch-mates.

A wet, dim, unventilated home for the molluscs and limpets who for four hours had clung to the steel shell that carried them Londonward. A cave-like space with slimy floor—a floor that was scrubbed with a scraper, which never was dry—which usually held a few inches of water sluppering to and fro to keep the men hard, and now held six.

A bogey stood in the cave puffing smoke, even as the molluscs and limpets who lounged in bunks above it; spitting as they spat each time a sea climbed and touched its funnel; flinging hot ashes upon the sodden deck in simple spleen—perhaps the lord who built the thing, or the lord who sold it, may know whether this be possible.

The limpets swore it was spleen. The molluscs were of opinion it was stupidity; but the stove itself said plainly it was tired of alternate heat and cold—tired of the seas which trickled down and reached it. That is why it spat and sizzled. That is why the men who lounged in bunks struggling with sleep, damned the stove and sometimes let it lie fallow.

Each time the *Griselda* slammed at a roller the hiss of a thousand squirts accompanied the boom which sounded in the cavern; each time her stern sank Niagara thundered overhead. From fo'c'sle-head to well-deck—from every scoop and gully, dipping there in the murk above the cavern. In some ships the forecastle is called the pit, in others the cavern, in others Hell. All point to the same dismal end. But the limpets and molluscs who had christened *Griselda's* sheltering thatch scarcely knew the point of their jest.

Griselda climbing rollers which had no driving force behind them was a wet and stupid specimen of the things which are hammered out in scores to carry the shoddy supplies which England demands and cannot grow. Without a deckload she was a dabbler, wet, slow, the sport of a gale should it find her; but with a deckload, gale or no gale, she was wicked. Her engines could make her quake yet they could not make her spin. She was just a drudge, a beast of burden run at an economic speed, upon which the sea could leap and strive to smash her, sectionally.

Once or twice in her life the seas had nearly won; but that was before the carriage of deckloads in winter came

into favour with the lords who rule, and she had staggered through.

It is fine to fight the sea, to pit intelligence against force and win through a flurry of snow or hail or cyclone, with a ship which is competent to fight; but there is no fight in the staid cargo boxes which crawl as the *Griselda* crawled from dawn to dark and from dark to dawn at seven or eight knots an hour. If they meet a gale which is a gale they founder or turn turtle.

Last voyage, as Treegan bore witness, because of a glut of cargo they gave her a deckload which made her dizzy. "One hundred and seventy-five tons o' top-weight . . . ou aye! more than a mouthful . . . an' we managed to scrape inta Queenstoon—a place standin' ready for us by the mairey o' God . . . an' there the knackers had a look at us an' said theengs, Cap'n O'Hagan, I wadna care to repeat."

Sharum would have rid himself of *Griselda* on that happening; but the boom ran high, tonnage was scarce, and he was under contract to appear yet again with a "bottom" of certain displacement, and the *Griselda* sailed for New York with Denis O'Hagan as master. A man, you will understand, who would have been adjudged mad to refuse so fine an opportunity.

So this was *Griselda's* last caper under the red ensign; and they had given her every incentive to make it her last for all time. Willy-nilly when she reached home she would go to the knackers. Perhaps Norway or Japan or Italy—all growing wary of late—would look kindly on her and buy her. Perhaps some Jew of the East might make a bid for her, change her name and keep her as a trap to drown pilgrims on their way to win the green turban. Some day when the gods were angry she would go. But the Red Ensign would fly over her no longer; the house-flag under which Sharum had grown fat and the crews of *Griselda* thin would be dowsed at last. Time, the conqueror, had won. She had helped Sharum to climb. He stood on a pinnacle very plainly assailable. Peter Witterspoon, sorrowing in New York, or gone to drown sorrow in the West Indies, especially desired to keep his name out of tricksy adventure. Therefore word had gone round that *Griselda* would be sold. No hint of her capacity for mischief, her pendulum-like swing, her time-worn boilers. Let those learn who bought. Other-

wise how may the round world wag and geegaws be found to bring light into the eyes of those who love us ?

The wind soughed in *Griselda's* iron shrouds up there in the dark. Her short masts cut unerringly the segment of a circle against heavens which were glum, glum as the sea which lay under them. A door banged, iron upon iron, somewhere in that pair of alleyways beneath the bridge which gathered the seas and sent them aft like a mill-race. Young Evans coming from his room to take his watch up there upon the bridge stepped through it.

The chief met him at the engine-room exit.

"What's come tae the weather?" he asked, grimly critical of the booing outlook.

"Been through your condensers and got the salt wrung out of it," said Evans.

"It's wet to saturation," the chief admitted, "but there's nae blacklead in my 'condensers,' as ye ca' 'em. What's the glass doin'?"

"Low—28·85, and going lower."

"I'm gaein' ta bed," said the engineer. "I'm verra tired o' twilight. If ye come across the sun, or ae moon . . . or even at a pinch ae star that shines oot . . . let me know. I'll get up an' look at it."

He clanged his door. Evans moved through the swirl and reached the bridge, where the same note met him.

"Somethin's brewin'," said Treegan, as they came together. "The old man says we're in for dirt. That's true—we are. Dirt spelled big an' large, an' dinna you forget it. I'm gaein' ta bed—we'll be roused out before long. The course is N. 73° E. . . . she's doin' grand—aboot seven knots. An' ye'll ca' the old man if ony change comes. He's lying doon in chart-room. . . ."

Dirt was about. True, it was in being if smudged horizon, glum clouds which seemed to touch the mast heads, and the slop and thump of seas undriven yet leaping on board be the indices. Neither O'Hagan nor his officers had any doubt on this head; but the man who can prophesy whether the still thing we term Force will develop here or there on the chart he examines, or in some other sphere, is unborn.

Now at ten o'clock Evans went to the navigator's room and reported

"It looks bad, sir. The glass has steadied on 28·75. It pumps a bit."

Pumps. That is one of the signs that the thing which was brewing is brewed, that all Bottle-fillers should be prepared.

O'Hagan read the barometer and stood watching the mercury. Young Evans had spoken by the book. It pumped. The gyrations made by the instrument pointed to their lurching progress. *Griselda* had a curious knack of rolling. It was time O'Hagan went on deck. He switched off the light and passed out.

Glum. Glum. A world of passionless torpor; clouds which enveloped them as in a case; seas rolling in the form of swell from the north—steep, long, but, as yet, unlashed.

Griselda wallowed solemnly in the valleys formed by the hills. Sometimes the hills tipped her, sometimes rolled on board, sometimes struck her and fell back with a splash that suggested exasperation.

And the black night couched over all, throwing out warnings which were minatory, listening to the twitterings of those who were Bottle-fillers.

"Black as the Earl of Hell's riding-boots!" said the man who steered. "It's a knock-out."

"Black as my bunk in the fo'c'sle," said a grim person, who swore to his apprentice companion. "W'en we get 'ome out o' this, sell yer bloomin' soul to get shut of the sea."

CHAPTER XIII

SPLENDIDE MENDAX

After O'Hagan had been on the bridge an hour he had learned just how hardly they were to be tried. He recognised, too, that the experience was due. Had they not found fine weather all the days of their outward journey? Had it not been fine in New York? Could he, as a sailor, expect to sail kid-gloved about the world, escaping gales for ever? Since that passage in the *Sphinx* he had scarcely come in touch with a gale worthy the name—but now they would see one.

That took him away on a flight which told him he had promised to call Lucy to his side if necessity arose. He questioned whether the moment had quite come, and decided at once that presently, if he knew anything of sea and sea life, he would be unable to leave the bridge.

He crossed and said to Evans, who marched to and fro near the compass—

"I am going aft to call Mrs. O'Hagan. Keep a look out until I get back."

Evans moved to the wing section, acknowledging the order, and O'Hagan hastened aft. He went by way of the flying bridge, that plank-like structure which Lucy had crossed on the night of fog, when he had won his star, and midway to the poop he paused to stand awhile, staring into the blackness. The jar of something heavy, something which moved as the ship rolled, told him it was time to be up and doing. He swung from the bridge by a guy rope to obtain further knowledge, escaped crushing by a miracle of handiness, and climbed again to the bridge.

In that short interval he had seen peril at its birth.

The darkness was a factor which swiftly assumed new proportions; the gale for which they waited lifted a minatory finger, now that he had seen. He completed his journey to the cabin at a run, opened Lucy's door and found he had no occasion to call her. She was awake, the

light fully on. He saw that she was dressed to her petticoat and wore rubbers. Water rilled across the bare deck, and she came to him at a run because the *Griselda* compelled speed when she swooped at a roller.

O'Hagan caught her and held her close—"Steady! little Mem-sahib," he said in her ear. "Can't play tricks these times . . . couldn't you sleep?"

They swayed together like dancers preparing for bacchanalian steps in a tango, and quickly recovered balance.

"I was so scared," Lucy answered, her face against his, her arms round his neck. "Something's banging. It woke me. I was dreaming of collisions—there! What is it?"

The note was heavier here. It came with the booming stroke of a drum, the clang of iron.

"A cask," he said for her peace, "has broken adrift in the wash. Wait a moment. Cling on while I speak to the bridge."

He helped her to the settee and crossed to the tube. He whistled and stood waiting, then, after a short pause, said—"Is that the second officer?"

A faint reply came back and O'Hagan said—

"Call all hands. Get the chief out as soon as possible. I shall be on the bridge in a few minutes. Get them out quickly."

Again came the soft, purring answer—and a chord from the sea which drowned it. O'Hagan replaced the whistle and turned round—"We shall have to be slippery, too, Kiddy." He came over and took her by the waist, holding her while he explained.

"The deck cargo is adrift down aft here," he said in her ear. "Don't be scared. It's part of the game. I spotted it as I crossed the bridge just now. Lucky I came to call you instead of using the whistle. . . . I think it is only fair to tell you, seeing it woke you, eh, dearest?"

She accepted that, a smile on her lips as she watched him. Only fools are blind, she said in her heart, but even a fool could read you, oh my husband!

"Always tell me," she said aloud. "I am not scared if I know. The booming woke me and I wondered . . . then I heard the sea. Help me to dress. I must come on deck."

"I came for you," he said with what indifference he could. "We shall be dancing presently."

"I knew it."

"How?"

"Going to be very horrid?" she asked, ignoring this, her eyes on his.

He nodded. With his head on one side, critical of her dress, he said—"I think you would have a better chance . . . of, of getting about if you rigged Tom Brown fashion to-night, oh dearest. A big ulster over all, no one can know?"

And again she read his anxiety without comment beyond—"Yes—I agree. Petties *are* in the way on the bridge. . . . How she does jump about." She unfastened a band and kicked free. "Give me my knickies, dear dearest . . . bottom drawer under the bunk." She drew off her rubbers and sat balanced on the settee, clinging to the rope he had fixed—her life-line she called it—laughing at his gravity.

He told her as he slithered to the drawer that the ends of a ship were always worse than the middle, and Lucy accepted his explanation with a glance which caressed. "Of course they are. Isn't that why they put cabins over the screw and in the bows for the crew-people?"

"The crew-people," he smiled back, "are limpets in these days. The only qualifications for a sailor are that he can speak ten words in English and stick on . . . two-thirds of our men can do neither."

The ship swooped savagely at a roller and leaned down. The water gushed over towards the saloon door as O'Hagan handed the garments. He crossed back through the slurry and called up the bridge.

"Let me know when the chief is on deck," he ordered, and replaced the whistle.

He stood near guarding his wife as she dressed, listening to the thud of seas as they lolloped on board. Sometimes he kept her with one arm about her waist, sometimes only by main force could he keep her from a swift dash at the opposite bulkhead. He questioned whether nainsook was sufficiently warm for the conditions which presently would arrive and said—

"Haven't you a flannel shirt you can put on over that? Wrap up, Mem-sahib. It will be cold."

"I'll borrow one of yours," she smiled back at him. "Tom Brown hadn't much of a kit and I must get

you. . . ." She came at him with a run, her hands lifted. "Catch me! Quick! Quick!"

He caught her and in a passion of tenderness, fear, ecstasy, kissed her as a man will who has seen danger and averted it, who has seen that in spite of his obvious failure the girl he has won still has faith in him.

"You recognise it's going to be bad?" he asked under his breath. "You recognise it?"

Lucy faced him, her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkling. "I recognise that I am with you," she gave him, glowing.

"It may be too much for the *Griselda*, dearest," he whispered as they lurched to windward and a sea climbed slobbering at the ports.

"If I have you with me, it does not matter, does it—about *Griselda?*"

"Together then"—he smiled and held her close. "Together—win or lose?"

"Together!" she responded and met his lips.

The bridge speaking tube raised a sharp trill and O'Hagan called into it and listened—

"Yes—chief there? . . . Right. Tell him to meet me on the poop deck at once."

He took a quick survey of the room, pocketed a revolver and joined Lucy, who awaited him on the stairs. He slammed the door as he passed through it and took Lucy's arm. The stairs were dark; even the light from a skylight which stood abaft the companion was shut out now by the closed doors at the top.

"It's like going into a tunnel," Lucy whispered, gripping his arm.

"Or a drain," he joked, supporting her. "Half our days are spent in a drain."

He was uplifted and buoyant in the belief that he had succeeded in blinding her; but the phrase "in a drain" recurred again and again as he stood waiting. He wondered what had given birth to it, and found himself staring at a sea which swirled level with the rail. It would be horrid to drown, madness to watch others drown. He would rather use the pistol he had pocketed . . . but there was Lucy to consider; they might not drown, and people who use pistols because someone is standing on their toes are not the type a man cares to grip by the hand.

His gaze took in the threatening aspect. It was black. He refused to minimise it; and this new bother with the deckload increased his anxiety. Deckloads are a curse. They were the result of greed—our competitive system. It was a deckload that caused the loss of the *Sphinx*, and now that his future depended on getting the *Griselda* to her corner in Royal Albert Dock the same peril had arisen. Well—they could fight. There would be no pistols. Fight! Good God! as though that availed; as though anything availed for men entangled in the cogs of Supply and Demand.

And yet he might win! He saw the possibility. It crossed his mind in a dozen aspects; what if he did win? one of them.

Would they reverse, quash or whatever it was, their judgment on him? Would a double-first in the Arena of Deeds wipe out that deadly and pursuant discriminating influence known as the Black List, which held him down? Would the Foreign Office alter its opinion? A wonderful headiness mastered him as he stood there looking down into the drain. He decided that England, the splendid country of his adoption which evolved persons who argued that deckloads were safe because they permitted no space for lodgment of the seas, would back him here.

He had come a long way on the road to success. He had decided to fight this thing to the end—to go out fighting if need be; but to fight if it were only to prove once again that he was not a fool, that he was not addicted to drink, that the loss of the *Sphinx* was due to her deckload and to nothing else under God's stars. . . . He had come a long way; but not all the way. He had seen too much on that hurried visit to the well deck. And there it must remain. At all hazards he had blinded Lucy.

He drew her to the rail at the break of the poop. Together they stared down at the chaos of the well. Seas rolled there as among the rocks off the nearest headland—seas for ever charging and retreating, creaming, running pell-mell to find exit; bashing, thrashing, tearing amidst the casks and cases lashed there to earn dividends for *Griselda's* shareholders.

Safe? Of course, on paper, it was safe. Risk? Naturally statisticians, sitting comfortably in warm offices, proved to all comers the risk was infinitesimal.

But O'Hagan, leaning over that boiling pot, Treegan beside him, Lucy at his elbow, knew just how great was the risk, how futile were arguments, either *pro* or *con.*, at this moment.

"Get the hands with you and see what you can do," O'Hagan ordered. "Look after yourselves and the devil take the cargo. If you can secure it, do so—if not, pitch it overboard."

Treegan, with a watch at his command, summoned from sleep they had earned, climbed into the well and the fight was in being. Four sailors, two boys in the process of acquiring knowledge, one officer, constituted the forlorn hope which set out to prove the risk was overrated; to prove that space occupied by cases cannot hold seas. The seas swirled over them as they descended.

The chief gave orders briskly as he climbed into the swirl—"Steam on the winch there, Larry. Get her coat off, you boys. Open your cocks—an' run her through gingerly!"

He vanished in the black night, and O'Hagan, holding Lucy's arm, made his way to the bridge.

"Anything in sight?" he asked Evans.

"Nothing, sir."

"Good—I will take the watch. I want you to go aft with the chief. Do all you can as quickly as you can, and let me have word from time to time. We shall have wind presently."

Evans moved away at once. Eight was the company, there, to whom this task, which had caused the loss of the *Sphinx*, was assigned.

Six men and two boys, working presently in the glare of cargo lamps, which Treegan found means to hang over them.

And the seas swirled waist high at each roll; the cases clanged; iron doors, crowbars, slices clanged, the winch spirted gusts of steam, gurgling sometimes, hissing sometimes, and Treegan, with Evans beside him, found new swear words to fit the occasion.

They worked with an energy which was eloquent of their danger. They worked as men work in a mine when the roof has made a prison for those who are in far-off galleries. And sometimes they succeeded and sometimes they failed. Breast high the lolloping seas came upon them, knee high they trailed to the gutters. At all angles

the deck stood under them. From all sides came a torrent, eating its way into the heart of the deckload; stealing a case, stealing a cask, tugging at the ropes and chains which bound them; jamming a man, nipping a boy—devilish in attack; subtle, quick, strong, ready in a moment to smash one who was down.

Midnight saw them fighting under the blear dome which stooped to shut in the *Griselda*, to hide her, keep her from the sight of those who, perchance, might consider her conquered. It saw men wet to the skin, torn, bruised, but undaunted. It saw men fighting for life with a full knowledge of what otherwise would be theirs. It saw them baffled by the weight and ferocity of attack, four men, two boys, two officers, dropping their tools and tramping after the mate for their "refresher." It saw these Bottle-fillers emptying a bottle; taking each of them in dirt or blood stained fingers the glass which held three pennyworth of rum, drinking their tot; getting new heart in them—something to make them savage, ready, as they said, to sacrifice their soul-case for a shareholder's dividend. It saw them re-enter the arena and start work. It listened to the bang and crash of iron and timber; of a squeal which ended in laughter.

Each cask that went overboard in the blind slurry of black water rushing there in the well, meant something off the dividend *Griselda* would pay; each case smashed a shortage over which someone would mourn. The act of God would come in here; come in to save shareholders at the expense of those who write risks. True. That is the *splendide mendax* of the sea, a phrase upon which even the unlearned have learned to frown.

. . . .

O'Hagan stood at the wing of the bridge, taking duty for his officers. Lucy, with a girdle of rope about her waist, clung on beside him. In place of her flapping ulster she now wore a Bottle-filler's suit of yellow oilskins. Her trousers were tied with ropeyarns at the top of her boots, a lashing was round her waist, both sleeves were gathered in at the wrists and fastened over mits. She wore a yellow sou'wester over her cap and beautiful hair, and she smiled, considering the sight she presented.

It rained steadily. Wind came in gusts, as from the mouth of a cave; cold, biting wind, which made those two pray for a run, for a walk, anything to stir the blood

and bring warmth—but they could not run. *Griselda*, under the influence of top-weight, made it uncertain which side of her would presently be uppermost. Therefore, Lucy remained seated and tied.

It was two o'clock, and the Griseldians had won. Ten minutes ago Treegan marshalled his draggle-tailed legion and took them off to bed. He said they had earned it, and no one challenged the statement but those two who remained at the wheel and look-out, working double-tides without additional pay. Treegan, Evans and the crowd had won. They had proved, with the help of a tot or two, that there was no risk. Deck cargoes were safe. For the moment some seemed inclined to bless deck cargoes—their own at all events. Had it not found them "twa goes o' rum?" and who that has taken rum in these conditions can find heart to curse the cause which won it?

They had won. Now they were in bed—wet still, but getting warm, tobacco to inspire them. Only the bruises and cuts they had received troubled them—but these might have been worse. Lying in their narrow pews, Treegan and Evans scarcely better served, they told in fierce speech what would have happened if Bill Smith and Ted Flanaghan "hadn't come acrost that 'ole wot the sea 'ad torn, an' plugged it, an' got the water drained out of 'er."

And O'Hagan, marching to and fro between wheelhouse and Lucy, admitted, because she had heard Treegan report it, that it was providential the thing had been discovered.

"A ventilator washed away—shorn off at the deck, Mem-sahib. It left a fine hole. One of them found it by falling into it—might have broken his leg, by Jove . . . but he didn't."

He stood over the dodger seeking to determine what faced them up there in the cave of the winds.

But nothing appeared. All black darkness, rain and a rising breeze—scarcely a gale.

At three o'clock there came a note of wrath upon the sullen patchwork of cloud and sea. A rent in the heavens through which, for a moment, other worlds stood out shining, poised, as it were, before a lifted curtain.

The note swirled and rose to a scream. It died away and the rent vanished.

O'Hagan stood there unmoved, but watching the northern horizon. In sailing ship days he would have waited no longer. The warnings he had received were sufficient. He would have called out all hands. Sails would have been clewed up, stay-sails run down, and men and boys would have been busy stowing canvas.

But in the tramps and liners which bring us food and paper and coats and cosmetics, and incidentally find dividends for shareholders while our fields lie idle, the only sane order is screw down and twist ventilators. And to that you may add, if you will, rig life lines. O'Hagan could do no less. He stood on the bridge very much as an engineer stands on the footplate of a locomotive when it rushes into a tunnel. What he would meet in the tunnel he could not say. Whether it would be as black as it looked was in the lap of the gods. Screw down your ventilators, caulk them if there be time. Twist the cowls up there over the stokehold, so that the black squad may keep dry. A tramp is a machine. Good. Let her rip into the tunnel.

But a difference exists. A train runs on lines which are of steel, guided and warned by a fine network of signals; a tramp runs on lines which are traced on a chart by people who have no hand in the driving, who scarcely know the sea or its moods, and have small occasion to learn.

Griselda, stone-heroine of the Teutons, slopped boldly towards the tunnel. She rolled at it and the wash of water in her well decks sounded high above the swish of her passage. Noises from the stokehold came clanging to the bridge. The clatter of a shovel, the escape of steam, voices from the men who delved for coal, all came resonant and round to the vault which held her, echoed and died.

A lull had begun. A failing of the gale, such as it was, which had throttled them since leaving New York. A still, brooding, pondering halt—as though He who lifted the whip paused to consider where best He might strike. *Griselda* lay guzzling the brine on either hand, playing at see-saw in the face of Omnipotent Force; pretending she was competent to roll and lurch and hang shivering on her bends as the *Strathmuir*, fashioned as we have seen by Glasgow.

O'Hagan released the line which held Lucy to the rail and led her to the chart-room.

"Switch on the light and read the glass for me," he begged. "I mustn't blind myself. Don't come out till I knock, but switch off the light as soon as you have made your reading."

"A-cha, Sahib, can do," she smiled up at him.

"It will be pumping, Mem-sahib—get a mean as nearly as possible."

And again as he opened and closed the door upon her she gave him the Eastern acknowledgment.

O'Hagan returned and spoke through a tube into the engine-room. "How are the wells?" he asked, and got for answer that all were normal except No. 4, where five feet still remained. "But we're getting it under. She'll be dry in an hoor," said a Scot.

Satisfactory so far. It might be worse. Five minutes elapsed, then O'Hagan went round to find Lucy. She was clinging to the door-handle, the light out, ready with her reckoning—

"Twenty-eight ninety, as nearly as I can get, oh dearest," she reported.

"Pumping much?"

"Two to three tenths—and there are sparks or something in the tube."

"Hum. . . ."

"That bad?" she asked as he led her back to her corner.

"It's going to sneeze," he said, "but we are ready. We can stand it . . . there's lots of sea-room here." He glanced around. "It will come out there where the stars showed just now."

"A gale?" she questioned a little wistfully he thought—but he dared not deceive her here. In an hour the thing would be upon them, or, at latest, with sunrise. He came quite near her and took her hand.

"It will be heavy," he said, his cheek touching the wet glove she wore.

"Worse than that night in the *Strathmuir?*"

"Worse without doubt. One of the Atlantic particulars—one of the sort we used to ask for when we were running the Easting down in the old days, or when we were past the Western Islands and homeward bound. . . .

"Generally we got one, too," he chuckled, "sometimes half a dozen on end, sometimes two or three rolled in one. Coming home from Melbourne, too, anywhere between

South Cape and the Horn we danced before gales and asked for them . . . but that was in a sailing ship, oh dearest—cadet ship if that is plainer, and we knew what to do with a breeze. . . .

"Steamers want quiet weather. Sailing ships want wind—that is the difference between them. . . . Gales! Good heavens, to read the accounts of some of the passages one would imagine that gales were hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons, everything of the biggest. Atlantic gales are pretty bad—but they rarely touch hurricane force, luckily. The boats make hurricanes of them. That is the truth. If a hurricane really swept the Atlantic to-day between forty and fifty north latitude half England would be in mourning to-morrow. Luckily they don't—make your dear mind easy on that. . . ."

He did not tell her that 28.75 and 28.90 were cyclonic readings at this season; that the sparks she saw pointed to one of the worst of Atlantic gales. Not a word either of that deckload which troubled him, in spite of the fact that Treegan had managed to secure it.

But he did not know *Griselda*. And had he known her, there was but one order he could give—"Screw down and caulk ventilators," and after that "spray oil upon the water while she lets you."

Again he marched, considering the portents, sometimes halting to speak a word to Lucy, to ask if her chair was firm, to look through the small slide into the binnacle. Once he scribbled a note and sent it to the engineer on duty.

A blur confronted him each time he paused to look ahead. A brumous smudge without horizon or any hint of it. No lights anywhere but the dim phosphorescent gleam down there in the well, and the shimmer overside as they struck fire from the seas. Less wind again. Swell becoming confused, leaping at the bow as well as the beam. Pish! Nothing in sight but the spume it made. The crash of slopping seas the only sound. Someone yawned down there in the stokehold.

"Eyah!"

He rattled his shovel and a furnace door clanged. More work accomplished. Relief near. Thank God!

O'Hagan stared out upon his command; this vessel, which had enabled him to win a star and now mocked from the black darkness he faced.

She was there to respond to his call, should he call; to do his bidding; to twist hither and thither while her rudder remained good. She was there as a dim figure of something that throbbed and swayed beneath his feet. Something he could feel but could not see; something which moved and splashed, twisted, lurched, groaned, burrowing like a mole in seas which marched with increasing sting.

He stood there watching her, searching the horizon, and an acrid smell assailed his nostrils; he moved at once to the compass and stood sniffing, twisting the binnacle.

"Smell anything?" he called out to Lucy.

"Smoke," she replied from her corner.

"See anything—out there to windward?"

"Nothing, oh dearest," came back after a pause. "Why?"

"Something passing!" he called back. He crossed, and blew a blast on the whistle, a long note.

Then after a minute sounded the answer—the deep and sonorous bellow of one of the flyers.

The smoke passed. The steamship passed. They had not seen her, but O'Hagan knew that a greyhound had overhauled them, brushed past, and that all was well.

Then from the fiddley grating came the voice of one of the black squad—

"Say, Bill, wot's the difference between a mail-boat an' a tramp?"

And an answering voice which said—"Difference? All the bloomin' world. One drowns millionaires and the other drowns sailors."

"Call yerself a sailor—bah!"

"Board o' Trade does—not me, sonny. Get dahn to yer job."

. . . .

Eight bells. Four o'clock. Something brewing up there in the dark. O'Hagan examining the lashings of Lucy's chair, and pulling tight a life-line for his own protection. He came over and stood a moment to cheer her.

"Sure you are warm, little girl?"

"Quite—quite."

She captured his hand and hugged it.

"It will be on us now," he said, stooping near. "Better go into the chart-room and lie down?"

"I will stay here, unless—unless it makes you anxious."

He knew that he was anxious, but he knew, too, that the chart-room would not alter that. He pressed her hand, and said—

"No—stay for a time, at all events," then moved away to send a message to turn out the crew.

A call this for those drenched sea-boys who were drying in their bunks; a call for Evans and Treegan to get out of their too small bunks; get into war-paint and tackle their duty.

"There's something adrift down aft again," O'Hagan announced when Treegan stood beside him. "You must get the hands together and see what you can do with it. . . ."

"It wull be the casks," said the chief. "There's nae lashin' spun that wull hold them in this wash. An' if I can't secure them, what wull I do?"

"Put them over the side, my friend. I leave it to you."

"It's dune, sir," said Treegan. "I gie ye my word on that."

Out there in the north-east a gleam appeared as the chief left. In three minutes it had lifted to an arch which spanned the heavens midway to the zenith. Then a squall swept up to give life to the game, to give men something to fight. To brush away this pot-house gloom and let them see what came.

It advanced whirring, and nearly in line with the swell which had kept them rolling thus far from New York. Wind, rain, hail accompanied it, and the *Griselda* swayed white upper works upon the dazed sea. It came towering under the dome which was their world, hung one moment overhead and flamed. Blue lightning tore the black envelope which shut them in—four or five rivulets, zig-zag, brilliant, down, up, across; and a roar crashed out, drowning all sound. It flung from high heaven a bolt forged where none wield hammer, grip tongs, or batter on an anvil—and *Griselda*, ambling staidly her eight knots, failed to intercept it.

She lay over to the gale, astonished at its vigour, lighted one dazzling moment from truck to waterline, then passed hissing into black night swiftly as she had emerged.

The squalls kept her alive. They came upon her in screaming and swift succession. The swell became a sea, capped and militant. It broke on board with drum-like

thud, which speaks of weight, of force, whipped up and set roving amidst bollards and hatches, winches, steam-pipes, and all the paraphernalia of equipment. It came battering upon closed doors, upon skylights, climbing to the poop deck, the bridge, smashing at windows and tearing with giant fingers at the lashings of the deckload.

In ten minutes the seas were a hissing expanse of white foam, torn by the wind, beaten flat by the hail; seas which twisted under the attack and aimed surreptitious prods at the *Griselda*, pushing at her, leaping at her, pouring broadsides upon her and the netted atoms who fought her. From stem to stern, for one gorgeous hour, *Griselda* showed but her plank bridges, spanning chasms which brimmed with white spume as she rolled.

No deckload visible now, but plenty of room for the seas. Cases grinding, casks working loose, lashings, planks, quoins; all those driven-in wedges with their cunning admixture of rope and chain and screw and batten at hazard—now that Force was abroad. The netted atoms at work though, striving in a fine fury of intelligent aim to beat back the black god who drove, flicking with his whip at their vitals. Treegan and Evans led them on—"Before the sea gets up, my sons!" was the word. "Over with her! Bang goes saxpence!"

Sometimes the stars peeped down upon them, sometimes a squall flung hail and blackness; at every moment the lurching became heavier, the risks they ran in that swirl more terrible. They worked in a dun glow, which presently would be daylight—a coppery tinge glazed over sea and sky, wonderful to consider.

Up there on the bridge O'Hagan watched and strove to dodge the seas. With the helm and engines he worked his ship so that the impact should be lessened; twisting her so that she might plunge less steeply in the next abyss. And in the engine-room were men who assisted the governor, men who obeyed that clanging telegraph set up before them; who twisted levers, opened and shut valves, shouting orders at those who fired. They stood on gratings, close-penned against the sea by steel walls, which hummed as the fires hummed, crackled as under gunfire, hissed as the ashes hissed and spat, now that water rilled upon the plates. Machines elsewhere were helping—pumps set on brackets and bulkheads these; pumps with plungers gurgling, crossheads clucking, steam

hissing; pumps which must keep that water down which was growing, otherwise in all that clanging space there would be silence, cranks at rest, fires cold, *Griselda* still.

Three bells. Half-past five. Dark still and likely to be darker. Clouds racing to smother that glow which the wilderness had produced; to blot out that small band of Bottle-fillers who strove so noisily, with Treegan and Evans at their head, to rid *Griselda* of those casks and cases which should have earned dividends for her shareholders.

"Bang goes saxpence! Bang goes a dollar! Oot o' it! Oot! 'Ma mither will no let me hae any mair Oxo —she says it makes me grow oot o' ma claes!'" sang a voice.

"Who says grog oh?" another.

And through the din a squall crept up, clouds screening it, and found the *Griselda* lurching as of old, inclined to tilt and shoot all those noisy ones into the sea. It found her lurching, climbing with infinite pain the hills which rose in her path, slithering into the valleys they sucked. With the pertinacity of a machine intended by her makers to maintain an even keel she ploughed towards the dawn.

O'Hagan scented what was coming, but could not gauge its approach nor its weight. A squall lifted in an arch out there in the gloom. That he knew. Rain and hail accompanied it, hissing down the slopes. They were surfeited with squalls—yet others advanced. No doorways here for shelter, no roof to screen, no lee side—only the declared fury of the wilderness striking at their throat.

O'Hagan brought his ship nearer the wind. He strove to meet the seas with less shock, and in the near distance, broad on the bow moved one of those giants which the oceans keep in store and send out on occasion to sweep the seas clean.

No line of skirmishers climbing before to give warning. Only the wind note, the crash of seas in the wells, the scythe-like approach of hail.

O'Hagan crept to the high side and stood a moment before Lucy. He took her hands. "Come into the chart-room, dearest. It isn't fit for you here."

"Can you come too?" she asked throbbing, drawing him near.

"Not now!"

"Then I will stay, oh dearest."

"Right. God bless you!"

He squeezed her hands, and she saw him move away. He took up his stand as before near the compass, the telegraphs, close to the open window of the wheelhouse. It was just possible sometimes to catch an outline of him against the dark background, a gleam thrown by the binnacle on his face, a gleam on the wet surface of his oilskins or sou'wester.

She sat shivering in her chair, cramped and cold in spite of her denial, because in some dim way she understood. Den had not said there was peril, but Lucy knew. Her voyages to the East had given her a hint, the *Strathmuir* had shown very plainly what a deep-laden vessel may do in a sea-way. She knew what she knew.

Out there in the blackness, behind that drumming canvas which screened her, a giant sea moved down to intercept them. It advanced in stages, darkness its cloak. It came with a fizzle of white at its crest, spewing, fresh from a march which had seen bergs, floes and the bare shelters of the pack. Through the sea of whales it had come, growing in height, in extent and momentum. From the white edge of the world where the kayak is to be seen, to the Atlantic it had come, threatening in its march all those monsters which dart, not as the kayaks from headland to headland and bay to bay; but from world to world, carrying men and women, music and swimming-baths to amuse them, where the land is not. Here, too, go strange fire ships, carrying loads and sometimes spilling them; things which spit hot ashes upon the sea, throw dust in its face; which swerve, butt and lash at it, mocking it, shouting of mastery, of the triumph of steel and steam and skill—twitting the sea of a new tameness which has come to it.

It came angry from the silences to spy upon noise, and trapped that greyhound which had skimmed past *Griselda*. It smashed three round ports from her side, climbed and cut a navigator seventy feet lifted in air, then passed grumbling to find other victims.

It saw *Griselda* far down in the blackness, dreeing her weird, as they say, scrambling along towards the dawn, her decks crammed—a white picture of incompetence seeking to escape.

Fair game for the sea! One of the triumphs! One

of the haphazard, too-proud-to-learn type. One of the scow sort that gutter along trusting to steel, who pretend there is nothing to learn. One of the kind a sea will take in its arms and break in two while men snigger and say "The Act of God!" One of the kind the sea will take up and turn over, so that its cold omnipotence shall be visible wriggling in air.

It came by slow stages out of the dark, lapsing, swelling, and arrived alongside, sucking out a hollow for *Griselda* to lie in. It took her at a moment when her propeller was throttled, at a moment when O'Hagan, noting the roar it made, strove with helm and engine to meet it. It came quite buoyantly from its march and struck one smashing blow, and *Griselda* lay down before it, wallowing in the torrent it flung.

Out of the dark we come. Through the dark we march blindfold to accomplish destiny. Into the dark we return.

There came other blows. A flick at the stern, a smack at the bridge, a general fusillade of sound—but the *Griselda* no longer fought. She tilted.

CHAPTER XIV

DAWN

STEAM broke over the bridge from somewhere near in a volume which amazed. A concatenation of sounds ripped through the roar it made—shouts, cries, the falling of weights.

O'Hagan pulled himself gasping from the lee rail whither he had been flung. He commenced to climb towards the wheelhouse, shouting out, "Starboard there! Starboard!" And with the order came Lucy's name. He called for her, and felt wonder on receiving her answer. He cried out to cheer her. "Good old *Griselda*," reached the wheelhouse, and demanded starboard helm of the man who clung there like one dazed.

"Something's gone, sir," he ventured. "She won't answer."

O'Hagan forgot the belching steam, and said—

"Rubbish! Put it over!"

The man pointed to the indicator. "It's hard over," he said, "but she don't budge!"

"Keep it so. Watch her and let me know if she comes to." He rang up the telegraph and left it at full speed. And again he climbed, calling to Lucy.

He came near and learned she was safe. "Here! Here, oh dearest . . . I thought you were gone!"

"No. Please God, we'll pull through yet. A near squeak though."

He kneeled beside her, unfastening the lashings which held her. "We must get you out of this, oh my soul!" he called to her. "We must get somewhere where the seas can't climb. . . . Wheelhouse for the moment. On deck there! On deck!" He turned, shouting into the void, but the roar of steam and the song of the gale were his answer. He stooped and took Lucy in his arms. "Come!" he said in her ear, astonished at the coldness of her cheek, "we will get out of this. I—I can't quite grasp what has happened."

As the *Griselda* lurched to windward he ran for the door and entered. He clanged it to, unconscious that it clanged, and crossing found a place where Lucy could cling while a wheelhouse remained. He found that the helmsman had vanished. Then very intent on solving this riddle of loneliness, he stood by the lee door and saw how the seas poured over his ship. She careened even as he watched, and the seas swept her decks as a river in spate sweeps its bed. Something continued to crash away there beyond his vision.

He determined to go aft, and moved off blowing his call. In the engine-room as he passed a port he heard banging, a curious muttering roar. He cried out to know who was there, and his voice came back to him. He could obtain no answer, no sight here of those who should be at work. He reached the after end of the saloon deck and called for the mate, then a man wriggled up from the well and sat gripping the rail at his feet.

" Where's the chief ? " demanded the captain.

" Gawd knows. . . . I've not set eyes on 'im since she filled. Think she's goin' ? "

The steam roared through the fiddleys, making speech difficult.

" Steady, my son ! Seen the second mate, bo'sun—anyone ? " O'Hagan shouted.

" Gawd knows," said the man, " an' *Ee* won't tell us."

He gurgled the phrase and suddenly collapsed. Then O'Hagan saw that his leg trailed. A sea boomed high and sprayed them. The man slipped away. O'Hagan leaned over the rail shouting—" On deck there ! Clear away the boats ! Clear away ! "

The men he ordered, Evans, Treegan and those who were netted, no longer fought down there to save cargo, but for life. They swam and sank. They had been caught by the sea, crushed by cases, casks ; maimed and thrust out of the world. They struggled at the entrance of another. In a rage of blind anger they cursed the scow that had held them.

O'Hagan fought his way back to the bridge. He moved, groping in a squall of rain and hail past the chart-room, and found it gone. It seemed that he was alone in the ship, then presently he discovered to leeward men clearing away the boats. Their shouts came up in a fine jangle, shorn of coherence. Yet he knew that the black squad

fought here, men newly arrived from stokehold and engine-room, and one who met him said in blasphemous phrasing that a boiler had shifted, bust the stays, bust a steam-pipe, and belched the chaps as was near. . . .

"Where's the chief?"

"Down there—flayed."

O'Hagan came at a run to the wheelhouse, and found Lucy clinging still to the wheel. Again she cried out welcoming him—"Dear dearest! I thought you were lost. Den! Den! take me too when you go!"

He gathered her in his arms. The *Griselda* quailed under them. Bubbling noises were added to the jangle. The end was at hand—perhaps it would come swiftly, perhaps slowly. It might be that they would outlive this terror . . . it might be it would silence them.

Den found a lifebelt from the rack and fastened it about Lucy. He seized another and slipped arms into its loops while she fastened it. They stood one moment lip to lip, then emerged linked to face what came.

Numb already, that child of Major Faulkner's, drenched by the sea, cold from the endless watch up there on the bridge, but a smile on her lips as she moved out with her husband.

"You should have stayed for the *Carmania!*" he cried in her ear.

"You couldn't stay—then how could I?"

And again he hugged her, his thoughts racing, his eyes grasping the chances, the perils—a captain without a command, one whose ship lay dead under him, a few noisy ones struggling for escape.

They came to the place where these worked, launching a boat. The confusion was amazing, yet one directed who knew. They lowered as O'Hagan came near. Men stood and sat in it, others were at the falls. An engineer shouted, and the boat moved swiftly down—too swiftly. O'Hagan sprang close, crying out—"Easy does it! Steady there, steady aft!"

No one heard. Sea and steam conspired to blot out all order. The boat touched water, caught in the ship's side, and turned over.

Again the sea scored, slapping at the white sides of the thing it had conquered. A squall joined hands in jubilation. It screamed out over them as they worked, and *Griselda* lurched down, obeying it.

The angle became steeper. It became so steep that O'Hagan caught Lucy by the waist and scrambled to the high rail. He shouted as he went—

"This way! She's going over! Quick's the word!"

Some followed. Others stayed, trafficking with a boat which still remained in the davits. They strove in a fury of zeal until water met them, and they realised the *Griselda* would turn turtle. Then they, too, let fall the tackles and tried to climb; but the angle was more steep—they were unable to climb. They saw high above them people scrambling over the rail. They saw the dawn spread red and yellow behind them, and the towering bulk of the ship's decks careening overhead. They let go, and sprang into the sea.

Out there was a boat. Chance might so order it that they reached. They swam as the *Griselda* turned over, they swam as those others climbed, they swam and came to the boat's side.

Up there in the glare the ship's bilge appeared—steel plates coated thinly with barnacles, shell-fish, grass, succulent slug-like things, green, slimy stuff which made those who crawled there slip; which tore their hands, cut through the oilskins they wore, and permitted four only to reach the high shelter of her keel.

Denis O'Hagan came here, Lucy half in his arms. He crouched there under the fin-like steel which stood above them, crooning over the girl he had won. Twice he had fallen and twice succeeded in rescue—now he bent down, panting.

"Are you hurt? Are you cut? Look at your hands, oh dearest! . . . Look!"

He drew a muffler from his neck and wiped the salt from her face. "Hurt, my wife? Hurt?" he reiterated.

She gave no answer. She seemed stunned. He could not recall what struck her. Yet she was quiet.

She shivered in his arms, nestling near perhaps unwittingly now, clinging as all her life she had clung. . . .

"Look up! Look up!" he prayed, tears blinding him. "My Mem-sahib. . . . Look up. . . . You are safe—you are mine!"

Over there two others crouched, staring at the sea. Again Lucy shivered in his arms.

Faint, tired, bruised; at the end of their tether these two. Day growing over them, red, yellow, flaming in the

eye of the gale. Wind, sea, hail, sleet—a glorious blend spraying them, pelting them, dulling them.

Down there was a boat lurching in spume, bottom up like *Griselda*. If he would reach it O'Hagan must stir. At any moment their shelter might vanish, turn over again, plunge, disappear.

Yet they were quiet. The squall had coated them white. It was cold. The wind came at them with a personal attack that proved its intent. It scattered the white hail in their faces as they crouched there, waiting and in silence.

"Den!"

He heard his name and drew her close.

"Oh, my wife!" he gave back.

"I thought," she said slowly, "that somehow I had missed you . . . that you were gone. You won't go now, will you?" She laughed gently in his arms—laughed, and the pale god stood over her, beckoning.

"Kiddy!" he cried out, holding her. "Keep up, oh dearest—keep up."

"No use, Den . . . Baba is calling . . . and I don't think I could walk any farther . . . do you?"

She lay silent. Her lips moved. Perhaps she talked now with Baba . . . perhaps God looked down, and in His mercy made the way smooth for her. Perhaps He sent word to him who wielded the whip, and said—"Make an end."

A squall loomed near—so, too, a ship. But the squall reached first.

At its impact, *Griselda*, obeying as always the unstable sea, dipped a little forward, dipped a little aft; quivered and took up a bow wave which flicked off one of those who crouched; quivered again and flicked off a second—stooped and made a great effort to reach those two who remained.

So still they sat, so huddled, it seemed they did not see the end approach.

And the sea, curling high, flicked them also into the void.

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